WILLIE-FRANK OF STEDLEY

M. DE L. KENNEDY

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WILLIE FRANK OF STEDLEY

BY

M. DE L. KENNEDY

NEW YORK

P. J. KENEDY & SONS

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
He Arrives	1
CHAPTER II	
At Thorne House	10
CHAPTER III	
Getting Acquainted	19
CHAPTER IV	
Bob and Ray	31
CHAPTER V	
Hide and Seek	39
CHAPTER VI	
A Ride	51
CHAPTER VII	
To the Rescue	65
CHAPTER VIII	
The Island by Moonlight	76
CHAPTER IX	
Uncle Gerald	87
CHAPTER X	
Swan Boats	99

PAGE

CHAPTER XI
The Man in the Checked Suit . . . 110

CHAPTER XII
The Bird Store 121

CHAPTER XIII
Gyp 132

CHAPTER XIV
Welcome Home 145

CHAPTER XV
Father Owen's Instruction Class . . . 157

CHAPTER XVI
Lost * * * the Heir of Thorne House . 170

CHAPTER XVII
Willie-Frank and Fleet Wing 183

CHAPTER XVIII
A Farewell Party in Hermit's Cave . . 192

WILLIE-FRANK OF STEDLEY

CHAPTER I

HE ARRIVES

A MERRY troop of manly boys and sweet-faced little girls, waving hats and hands, stood on the platform of the small shabby depot of Stedley one bright afternoon in May.

"Good-by, Father! Good-by!" they called eagerly, affection brimming over in their clear young voices.

From the window of the receding train smiled back at them the kind boyish face of young Father Owen, curate of our Lady of Mount Carmel Church of Kanton, the nearest city. For Stedley, quaint, pretty little town that it was, nestling close to the shores of a beautiful lake, in spite of all its beauties was poor, very poor indeed in one particular. It possessed no Catholic church. Every Sunday one of the good priests from Kanton came down to celebrate Mass in a little low frame building situated near the railroad station on Main Street. But there was a First Holy Communion Class under instruction in that little frame building during these bright afternoons of our Lady's month, that in the fervor and purity of

heart of its members could not be excelled anywhere, north, south, east or west.

Young Father Owen came down three afternoons a week now, and it was a customary and pretty sight for Stedleyites to watch him proceed on his way to the railroad station at sundown, surrounded by his ardent and admiring little disciples. Two of the youngest members of the class clung to his hands, the rest circled around him, behind him and before him, all eagerly chattering like excited small magpies. At the depot Father Owen generally placed them under the care of old Matthew, the station agent, to "Shoo Off" as Matthew expressed it, when he himself had to board his train.

"I don't like to refuse to let them come, Matthew," he would say pleasantly, "but if you were not here I should feel much anxiety about leaving them."

"Sure, don't worry about 'em, your Reverence," honest Matt would answer grimly. "I'll 'tend to 'em, never you fear."

And 'tend to them he did, dispersing them in short time and good order, all but little Dolly Lambert, with her laughing face and big brown eyes.

"Oh, Matthew, don't you want to hear the story Father Owen told us to-day? It was be-au-tiful, Matthew."

"Well, well, tell it if ye must, me little lady, and then be hurrying along," he would say gruffly.

And Dolly, seated on the one and only baggage truck the station boasted of, her gay young face quite sweet with love and reverence now, would tell him in her own eager way the story of young Tarcisius who died with the Sacred Host clasped to his breast to save It from insult, of Saint Agnes and Saint Pancratius and many other sweet child saints of whom Father Owen was daily telling his little band.

Meantime, the boys of the class were grouped around Jimmie Cleary, who, as acknowledged leader among those of his own age in Stedley, was making alluring plans for a baseball game in the fields back of his house "to-morrow morning."

Just at this exciting moment, up Main Street rolled a wonderful, golden-brown automobile. The chauffeur stopped the car and beckoned to one of the lads.

Alone on the rear seat of this gorgeous machine sat a little figure in gray dust coat, gray cap and immense yellow motor goggles. But I am not exact when I say alone, for there were also two dogs. One was a snow-white poodle with a corn-colored ribbon perkily adorning his neck. The other was a black and white fox terrier with twinkling brown eyes. The latter wore a leather collar in which was inserted a tiny silver plate. Had you been near enough you would have seen engraved upon it:

TWINKLE,
Owner.....William Francis Thorne.

Bobby Evans, a red-haired boy with a pleasant freckled face, crossed over to the man at the wheel who was bending out to speak to him. The other boys watched with interest the child and the two dogs.

"He's a boy!" announced Jimmie Cleary.

"No, she's a girl!" contradicted Ray Lester.

"Girls like dolls, not dogs. I say he's a boy," scoffed Dick Smith.

"Well, look at the curls," protested Ray. "Boys don't wear curls, do they?"

True enough, the small person in the automobile did have curls such as any little girl might wear: long, beautiful auburn ones.

Jimmie Cleary's faith was not, however, so easily shaken.

The child who was the cause of all this excitement could hear their remarks, and standing up looked at them through the yellow goggles for a moment, and then disappeared from sight down on to the floor of the machine. The black and white terrier, with a bark, followed.

"Pooh!" said Ray, swinging on his heel, "she's a girl all right. I knew she was. She's afraid!"

The others watching closely, however, saw the gray cap and curls jerk up again, and in the hands of the child were oranges.

"Catch!" a clear voice called. One slim little arm swept out and lo! neither Dick, nor Ray, nor Ted, nor Jack was quick enough, but Jimmie Cleary, leaping into the air, captured the golden fruit with neat skill and swiftness.

"Ha!—ha!—ha!" laughed the pitcher. "Bow—wow—wow!" barked Twinkle, the terrier. "Yap—yap—yap!" joined in the pretty poodle.

"Hip,—hip,—hooray! He's a boy, like I told you. I said so all the time," Jimmie Cleary crowed.

"Put one here, will you?" Dick Smith yelled holding out his hands cupped invitingly.

"Me too," chimed in Ray.

"Can you toss another as straight as that?" asked Ted Bemis.

Swiftly they came with true, unerring aim, and as the boys caught, they cheered.

The chauffeur was unable to make himself heard for a moment. The noise was great and Bobby Evans was too excited to listen because he wanted to catch an orange also. At last the man turned and spoke to the automobile boy, who stopped the orange throwing game for a moment and asked in a clear young voice:

"Do you know where Thorne House is? Which turn do we take next to get there?"

"We'll show you, come on," the boys shouted, and most of them began to lead the way by running up the street.

Jimmie Cleary lingered. "Thorne House is on Lake Street," he said. "That's first turn to your right and second turn to your left, then up a little hill and that's all. It's a big white house and there are lions at the door."

The chauffeur laughed pleasantly. "Sounds like the Zoo," he said. "Thank you."

Just as the car was about to start, the boy with the curls succeeded in unfastening the door of the automobile.

"Jump in," he said to Jimmie. Then looking at the chauffeur anxiously, he asked, "My Uncle wouldn't mind, would he, Mr. Jake?"

The man answered pleasantly, "Why no, I guess not. We can drop the little chap at the gate anyway. It's only fair to give him a spin; he told us the way."

Jimmie Cleary's big eyes opened very wide indeed.

"Do you mean that I'm going to ride in there with you and those dogs?" he said wonderingly.

Automobiles were scarce in the small village of Stedley and people who owned them were not in the habit of inviting small boys like Jimmie to share the pleasure with them.

"Yes, yes, come in," the other boy answered, laughingly merrily. "I like you. What's your name, please?"

Jimmie seated himself gingerly on the edge of the tan cushion and held fast to the side of the wonderful car as it started off with a soft purring sound. Then, he answered bashfully:

"Jimmie Cleary."

"Mine's Willie Thorne, but almost every one calls me Willie-Frank," his new friend explained.

After that the little boys were silent for a moment; both half-sat, half-stood, looking at each other from under their eyelashes. Shyness had overtaken them. The dogs paved the way for

their next words. Twinkle sniffed at Jimmie's orange, begged and finally leaped up to lick his face. Curly, the poodle, slid across the cushion and made a playful snap at Jimmie's hand. As he tried to draw it away, the mischievous Curly softly reached out a pink tongue and licked the little brown hand as much as to say:

"I'm only fooling. I want to be friends with you."

When Jimmie saw the tiny white ball of fur stretch out beside him, fluffy head on cunning little paws, and roguish eyes blinking at him affectionately, he laughed and patted both on the head.

"Aren't they fine though?" he said joyously, finding his tongue quite suddenly.

"Yes," Willie-Frank said smiling. "They can do lots of tricks, too. This one is Twinkle. Shake hands with Jimmie, Twink. That's right. Now Curly, be good."

But although the fox terrier politely offered Jimmie a friendly paw, haughty Curly just rolled over on his back and gave a little "yap." He certainly looked as though he were laughing as he waved his four little feet in the air. Willie-Frank and Jimmie burst out laughing.

Jimmie began to feel as though he had known this boy and his two dogs all his life. At first he had thought he must be asleep and dreaming, and that this was a fairy prince who had asked him to ride in a golden chariot. He liked this Thorne boy very much.

The touring car swept past the other boys just

here, and when they saw Jimmie sitting beside the stranger and with both dogs trying to make friends with him, they set up a shout of glee.

The boys of Stedley, for the most part, were generous and manly. They all liked Jimmie Cleary, who could play games and run races better than any other small boy in town, and who was always willing to share his playthings or candy or fruit with the rest.

"Hi—Jimmie," they called out, "you're in luck."

One of them said, "Let's cut across lots and meet them at Thorne House."

"See you later, Jim," they shouted and soon all one could see were knickerbockers and strong little heels disappearing over the rail fence which surrounded a pasture where patient cows were awaiting their owner to let down the bars and call them home.

"I wish they could have a ride, too," Willie-Frank said, turning around to kneel up on the seat and watch the boys as they raced off. "This is my Uncle's car, though, and he might not like to have me ask so many to ride."

"Which turn did you tell me to take, young man?" the chauffeur demanded at this point. Sometimes the directions given by small boys are misleading, and Mr. Jake wished to be certain that Jimmie knew what he was talking about.

Both boys stood up and grasped the back of the seat which Mr. Jake occupied. Jimmie earnestly repeated his former statement and Willie-Frank

smiled affectionately at him while he talked. The dogs both hopped down off the rear seat. The poodle sat on the floor of the car with his cunning little face raised to his young master's. Twinkle stood on his hind legs and tried to reach up to the back of the seat which the boys were holding fast to.

"Are you going to stay at Thorne House?" Jimmie asked Willie-Frank when he had finished speaking to Mr. Jake.

"I don't know," Willie said. "Miss Debby told me Uncle Gerald had sent for me. Mr. Jake came to get me this morning. Do you know my Uncle?"

Before Jimmie could answer him, Willie continued excitedly: "He's an inventor, Miss Debby said. I'm hoping he will tell me all about airships and U-boats and things like that, you know; but Mr. Jake said he's cross and will make me toe the mark."

"Didn't you ever see him?" Jimmie asked, his eyes very big with surprise.

"Yes," Willie-Frank told him, "but I was little then and I don't remember him at all."

"We have a picture of him at my house," Jimmie said. "My Papa and he were chums. They went to school together. I like him, too. He was down in South America once and he sent me a baby alligator, but it died."

"Oh, did he? He sent me a monkey, that same time I guess. It was a winner," eagerly chimed in Willie-Frank.

"Have you got it now?" eagerly asked Jimmie.

CHAPTER II

AT THORNE HOUSE

"WHEN my Daddy went to Heaven last year," Willie-Frank explained, "the lawyer sent my monkey away and he sent me to school. I don't know where Gyp is. Perhaps he died like the alligator. I liked him ever so much," he finished with a tiny sigh.

"Well, I guess you'll like Mr. Thorne," Jimmie told him cheerfully. "The servants up at Thorne House always chase us boys away if we go up to play at the fountain, but I guess he wouldn't mind. I like him, anyhow."

"There's Thorne House! See the lions!"

Willie-Frank looked at the great white house standing far back from the street. Sure enough, there were Jimmie's famous lions. Huge brown stone creatures lying at either side of the steps as though on guard.

"Thank you ever so much for my ride," said Jimmie warmly as he prepared to leave the car.

"Will you come up and play with me to-morrow and bring the other fellows, too? I'll tell my Uncle that I like you all," Willie said.

Jimmie's face was aglow with happy smiles. "Sure we'll come," he answered. "We'd love to."

"Have some more oranges? See, I've got a basket full. Miss Debby packed them for me. She said I might get hungry riding," explained our hero.

"Thank you, thank you," Jimmie cried out as Willie filled his arms and hands.

Then the automobile started once more, and with a wave of his cap and a brave "good-by," the fairy prince was borne up into the grounds of Thorne House. The boys who had just reached the gate cheered him lustily, and indeed he looked a gallant little figure standing up in the car waving back at them. Lilac bushes lined the driveway up which the touring-car rolled.

"Here we are, sir," said pleasant Mr. Jake a few minutes later, stopping the car in front of the big brown lions of Thorne House.

Suddenly Willie's heart began to pound like a trip-hammer. Had he been younger than seven years old, he might have cried, so frightened did he feel. When a little boy has lost a dear Mamma and Papa, and has been living in a private boarding-school for some months with two dear old ladies in charge who petted him and favored him, it is rather lonesome to come all alone to an Uncle you have never seen, and who lives in a big white house guarded by brown stone lions. This Uncle was the elder brother of Willie's dear, dead Papa, and he was a very clever, busy man. He was "Somewhere in France" when his brother, Willie's father, fell fighting valiantly for the French cause at "the front." The wounded soldier, Don-

ald Thorne, lived long enough to see his elder brother and to confide to his care his beloved little son, Willie-Frank.

Then Uncle Gerald, at that great distance, did everything in his power to make life comfortable and happy for his small nephew, until the important service which he, through his latest invention, was offering France, would permit him time enough to return to this country and assume the full responsibility of his dear young charge.

Only yesterday Miss Debby had told Willie that his Uncle had come home.

Willie liked Miss Debby and Miss Anne very much, but he did not like to wear his hair long and be kissed a great deal; and he hated velvet suits with lace collars. He was really so much of a boy that it was right for him to object to being coaxed into acting like a nice, gentle, little girl.

Miss Debby and Miss Anne meant to be very kind indeed, but they did not understand that their training might change Willie from a manly boy into what other boys would call a "sissy."

The automobile driven by Mr. Jake had arrived at the school early that morning, and Willie had been tenderly embraced by the kind old ladies; the rear of the automobile had been filled by their good-natured cook with cakes and fruit of all kinds; the other little boys at the school had given Willie, who was a favorite with them, too, tops and marbles and games to remember them by. He had promised to send them all letters and postcards and so, amid the dear old ladies' blessings

and the shouts of his little companions, Willie-Frank had left "The Misses Wallis' Private School."

He had asked Mr. Jake what his Uncle was like. Was he old? Was he jolly, or was he cross?

"I don't know," Mr. Jake answered with his cheery laugh, "I've never seen him, though I've worked for him two years now. His secretary hired me. I've never been to his house in Stedley before. They say it's some place, little sir."

After guiding the car carefully through a dangerous traffic section of the big city which they were leaving, Mr. Jake continued:

"Guess he's a terror. All his servants are scared to death of him. Pays well, but expects them to do right by him whether he's here to look after things or not. Guess you'll have to toe the mark with the old gentleman, Sonny, from all I hear."

No wonder Willie Thorne began to feel frightened. Wouldn't you? Uncle Gerald had been pictured by Jake as though he were an ogre, and here was Willie-Frank, the fairy prince, riding up to the door of the ogre's "enchanted castle."

Lo! the small boy and his two dogs left the machine and climbed the steps. The front door opened wide and a tall, solemn butler bade Willie to enter:

"This way, sir, Mrs. Pepper is waiting for you," he announced grandly, waving his hand towards a grim, dark room.

Soon a little boy with two dogs "at heel" stood

before a cross-looking elderly lady in a black sateen dress. She sat in state in a high-backed chair and she held a large bunch of keys in her hands. Was this the witch of the enchanted castle, Willie wondered.

"You are Master William, I suppose," she began sorrowfully; "your Uncle could not get here as soon as he expected to. You must go to your room and stay there until you are called to tea. Don't carry mud over the stairs on your feet, don't scratch the furniture and don't make any noise. Your Uncle wouldn't like it," she ended with, and then pressing a bell she turned Willie over to the trim little maid who answered it, saying:

"Take Master William to the owl room and have those dogs sent to the stable."

"Oh, please may I have my dogs with me for a little while?" asked lonely Willie-Frank.

"Dogs in the house! No, sir. Go with Rosalie and remember *never*, never to question anything I say. Your Uncle wouldn't like it."

Willie followed Rosalie up two flights of stairs. Once he stopped and looked down through the banisters. Curly, the poodle, was whining dolefully, and Twinkle was giving sad little growls as a man servant bore them out of their little master's sight.

"Here we are," Rosalie said pleasantly as she threw open the door of a large, richly furnished room.

As Willie-Frank stepped in its bigness and dark

shadows added to his homesickness. It may seem strange to think that he could be lonesome for a boarding-school, but a sleeping apartment with a big four-posted mahogany bed and heavy window draperies, compared to a small, bright, airy dormitory shared with three other little boys, was rather discouraging, we must admit.

He stood on the mat near the door and squeezed his hands together in a big effort to keep back unmanly tears. Rosalie patted him kindly on the head.

"This is called the owl room because there is a picture in here of one of the largest owls ever seen. They say your Uncle tamed it and called it Beppo or some such name. When it died he felt dreadfully, so Baxter the butler says. Here is the picture."

Rosalie switched on the electric lights suddenly, and guided Willie-Frank to a space of the wall between the two deep-seated windows. There hung the portrait of his Uncle's famous owl.

Willie-Frank forgot that he was tired, hungry and lonesome, forgot that he had come very near to tears. He looked at "Beppo" and then smiled up at friendly Rosalie.

"He is pretty big, isn't he?" he remarked.

"That isn't all you'll find in this room, either," Rosalie said mysteriously.

Willie-Frank gazing around saw prints and enlarged snap-shots and beautifully framed pictures of many kinds of wonderful birds. This was truly a room any boy would like, after he stepped across

its threshold and the dazzling glow of a chandelier had put the dark shadows to flight.

"What else will I find, please?" our hero asked with a little thrill of delight at the thought of a surprise.

"Over there in the closet! I saw it one day when I was cleaning! Come, let's go and look."

Rosalie put her fingers to her lips, smiled gayly and tip-toed toward the closet.

Willie-Frank was enjoying himself immensely now. He tip-toed also and thought this kind girl with her white lace apron and fly-away cap the best playmate he had found among grown-ups, since dear "Daddy" went to Heaven to see "Mamma."

"One—two—three," Rosalie chanted, "open sesame."

Why, she even knew about Ali Baba! Willie-Frank clapped his hands merrily and laughed.

"Hush," said the girl, opening the door on a crack, and so the game went on until, little by little, the closed door was opened to its widest, and there among a man's riding suits and shooting jackets stood an old-fashioned rocking-horse. It had been a wonderful toy in its day and even now, as Rosalie and Willie-Frank dragged it out into the center of the owl room, its gray and black body looked quite bright and new. Its yellow glass eyes were shining as the electric lights fell upon them, its gay scarlet harness and brilliant red rockers made a steed worthy of any little modern boy's admiration. What it it was not the

newest kind of rocking-horse! What if the marks of other boys' restless feet were on its wood-work! What if the straps of the stirrups were worn and old!

Willie-Frank gave a shout of glee.

Rosalie chanted merrily, "I have a little pony. His name is Dapple Gray."

Dapple Gray stood quite high, Willie found when he tried to throw one chubby leg across the saddle. Rosalie held the frisky steed for him while he mounted. Then with another pat on the head she bade him good-by.

"The bath-room is right in here, dear," she said throwing open another door and switching on more lights. "If you will wash your face and hands I'll come back in about ten minutes to fix your hair. Don't be afraid and have a good ride while you are waiting for me. By-by."

"Good-by," called Willie-Frank heartily. "I guess I'm going to like this house," he confided to Dapple Gray as he started on a gallop which lasted until he remembered that Rosalie wanted him to wash his face and hands. Soon he had the faucets in the bath-room making merry music, while soap-suds festooned his dripping curls and his suit.

When Rosalie returned she found him busy sailing an immense bar of soap in the marble bowl.

Rosalie, laughing good-naturedly, called Willie-Frank from his soapy game and soon she was at work upon his tangled curls. Her quick but gentle fingers soon had the little boy ready.

His supper was served to him in the fine old-fashioned dining-room by a kind man-servant named Jean, who proved to be Rosalie's brother.

He saw no more of cross Mrs. Pepper that night. Bedtime came, Willie's earnest childish prayers were said and gentle Rosalie tucked him into the big, high-posted bed. At last she turned out the lights and sat down in a low rocker by the window. The moonlight made a silver pathway across the carpet and numberless stars smiled down on Willie-Frank.

Rosalie told the child that her room was next to his and that if he felt timid during the night he could call and she would come to him at once.

"Oh, thank you," chuckled Willie-Frank, slipping down out of sight under the bedclothes. Then in muffled tones, roguishly, but proudly, he added:

"I'm a boy, Miss Rosalie, even if I have got horrid curls. I'm not scary, but thanks just the same."

Soon Rosalie began to sing. She had a sweet young voice, and the pretty lullaby made Willie-Frank feel as though he were in a hammock under swaying pine trees and was being tossed, to and fro, by gentle breezes. Slowly he crept back up to the pillows again from his hiding place in the middle of the bed, his heavy eyelids dropped and he was—fast asleep.

His first day in Stedley was over.

CHAPTER III

GETTING ACQUAINTED

WHILE Willie Thorne lay sleeping with his cherished harmonica tightly clasped in his dimpled fingers, Jimmie Cleary, too, had embarked for the "Land of Nod." His dark head was full of rosy dreams for the morrow when, as he fondly hoped, his new friend, Willie-Frank, and himself, as well as the other boys, would play ball on the smooth wide driveway at Thorne House, or climb up on the stone lions, or sail small boats at the fountain.

"Jimmie, Jimmie," called gentle Mrs. Cleary outside his door the following morning. No answer and she was about to enter when Ellie, Jimmie's big sister, ran lightly up the stairs.

"Are you looking for Jimmie, Mother?" she asked pleasantly. "Why, he was up and out an hour ago."

"Without his breakfast?" Mrs Cleary said in alarm.

"Oh, no, I coaxed him to drink a glass of milk and really forced him to swallow his oatmeal, and then off he went in the direction of Lake Street," Ellie explained, laughing merrily.

"Oh, my dear, I hope he will not bother the people at Thorne House so early in the day. Per-

haps the little boy should not have invited him at all. I didn't think he would take the child's words to heart so, did you?"

"I'm afraid he did," said Ellie, "but Jimmie is a little gentleman, Mother mine, and if he sees that he is not wanted, he will come straight home, I am sure. He was traveling too fast to hear my voice this morning or I would have called him back."

At a very early hour Baxter, the butler at Thorne House, heard the heavy bronze knocker on the big front door rise and fall several times. When he answered its summons what was his surprise to see a small boy tumble into the hall at his feet.

"Oh," cried Jimmie Cleary rising and rubbing his knees. "You came too quick. I was trying to reach that big handle again and I had to stand on my tip-toes."

"What do you want?" asked Baxter in a terrible voice. He was looking now past Jimmie at what seemed to him an army of small boys on the rose-path which led from the gate. There were only six to be sure, but as they were all laughing and talking they made a considerable amount of noise.

"What do you want?" demanded the butler for the second time.

Jimmie removed his cap and smiled confidingly. "We've come to play with Willie-Frank," he said. "Please may he come out?"

"Sure, we've come to play with Bill. Where is

he anyway?" an older, rougher-looking boy at the end of the line chimed in.

"Baxter, who are these dirty children? Why are they at the front door?" It was Mrs. Pepper who spoke and her voice sent a chill over Jimmie. He knew as soon as he saw her face that the housekeeper at Thorne House was not friendly to him or the rest of the boys and his heart quailed. Keeping up his courage, however, he smiled once more and explained.

"We came to play with Willie-Frank. He asked us to yesterday."

"Go away," Mrs. Pepper said sternly. "You naughty, noisy children. Never come here again. Do you hear me? Didn't you see the sign, 'No trespassing?' "

Jimmie turned and walked down the big stone steps without even a parting glance at his beloved lions. On he went to the gate followed by his chums. All were, perhaps, sadder, wiser little boys.

" 'Tain't trespassing to visit any one, is it?" called back the older boy with the rough voice as they went out the gate. "Huh—we don't want to play with that little sissy-boy anyway. Wait until we catch him outside some day, we'll fix him, the little dude." Then with an Indian war-whoop he ran down the street.

Jimmie Cleary soon overtook him: "Now see here, Ted Bemis, don't you call Willie Thorne any more names," the smaller lad said, facing him squarely. "He's my friend and I like him, even

if that Pepper lady won't let us play with him. You had some of his oranges yesterday and you ate 'em, every one of 'em, so it isn't fair to call him names. He was good to us all, wasn't he, boys?"

"Yes"—"Sure"—"He's all right," chimed in the others.

Ted Bemis laughed. "I only wanted to frighten that old lady," he said. "I guess the little boy wouldn't be afraid of me. He's some fellow if he does wear curls."

Ted Bemis was a good-hearted boy and very brave. Jimmie Cleary was fond of him, but Jimmie's Mother and in fact the mothers of the other boys thought Ted too rough and too big to be a suitable playmate for the younger lads. These ladies felt sorry for him, however, because he had no parents and had to work hard on the farm where he lived with old Mr. Frost. For this reason they did not forbid the children to play with him, but tried in many ways to make the lad gentle by kindness.

Meanwhile, Willie-Frank, who had heard the voices, stood at the window of the owl-room, his rumpled curls bright against the silken draperies. Barefooted, in pink pajamas, he watched with sorrowful eyes Jimmie Cleary's dismissal from Thorne House.

Had any of the boys looked up they might have seen something very like their own disappointment in the sorrowful little face above, but they

disappeared quickly and Willie Thorne turned away.

After breakfast kind Jean (whose real name was Eugene) showed Willie-Frank where to find Curly and Twinkle. Then our hero very happily decided to go and look for Mr. Jake. It did not take him long to discover the path which led straight to the great square of ground facing the stables and the garage.

Some one called: "Oo-ho-o-hoo!" right above his head.

He looked up but there was no one in sight. The sound had come from the stables, Willie felt sure, so he rushed over to the open door, his dogs gladly following him.

"Hello!" said a voice. It belonged to a man who looked like a carpenter.

"Did you call me?" the lad asked.

"No, 'twas Jack. He's up aloft there."

Willie's eyes traveled upwards and saw far, far above, amid the topmost rafters of the old-fashioned barn, a boy of about fourteen years of age. He was sitting astride a beam and was peering out of a tiny window which overlooked the driveway where Willie-Frank had stood.

"How did he get up there?" Willie asked eagerly.

"Climbed, like a cat as far as I can tell you, Sonny! Jack's a caution when it comes to climbing. Ought to belong to a circus I tell him. Now, just what are you going to do, Bub? Mustn't try to follow his lead. Sho—you're too small and

those beams are too high; you'd surely hurt yourself."

The last remarks were occasioned by the sight of dauntless Willie-Frank attempting to reach a peg on one of the posts which supported the nearest hayloft.

The carpenter's remonstrance came just a second too late. Climbing was one of the things Willie-Frank liked best to do. He really must get up somewhere near that big boy so far above. He had gained the first peg before the carpenter had finished speaking. From the second he called back happily:

"I'm not going to fall, sir. I'll hold on tight. Ship ahoy up there!" he yelled.

"Aye, aye, Matey," called back the lad named Jack.

Willie-Frank was delighted and reached the third peg in his excitement.

The carpenter watched him with a smile.

The two dogs barked wildly, standing deserted by their master on the floor of the barn. Then Twinkle, with his usual brightness, found a stairway that led to the same hay-loft towards which Willie-Frank was climbing, and soon stood near the edge amid the hay, wagging his tail and ready to greet the boy when he reached the loft.

Flushed and laughing Willie tumbled up on to the dusty, hay-strewn floor, having managed all the pegs with credit.

"Hi!" said a voice. It was Jack who spoke. He had scrambled and slid down from his high

perch unnoticed by our hero who had been quite busy, too busy to watch him as the peril of climbing grew greater. This boy had a merry face and curly red hair. He wore blue overalls and a hat without a brim. He was chewing a straw but stopped long enough to smile good-humoredly at the smaller lad.

"Hello," he repeated. "Got any more oranges to give away? Ho! Ho! Ho!"

"Is he the chap that fired the oranges to Bob and the rest?" called out Jack's father from below.

"Yes," nodded Jack.

"Well, well," exclaimed the carpenter in a loud voice. "You are a nice sort of boy, Sonny, sure enough. I said so from the first."

"Bob is my young brother," explained Jack. "He told us all about you last night. He thinks you are all right." Jack was smiling at Willie Thorne with great friendliness.

"Oh, which one of the boys was Bob?" questioned the little lad eagerly. "I remember how they all looked, you see, but I don't know any of their names, 'cept just Jimmie Cleary."

"Oh, Bob has red hair like mine," laughed Jack.

"I remember him now," Willie cried joyfully. "He was the first one we spoke to. Mr. Jake called him over to the car to ask him the way. Is he around here anywhere?"

Willie-Frank was longing to welcome as a play-

mate any one of those delightful boys with whom he had become acquainted yesterday.

"No, he's at home, but it is not his fault. He'd be up here to play with you if he had his way. Come on down now and see what Father and I have been putting up for you."

They clattered over the stairs together, Twinkle bounding after them.

"See here," called Mr. Evans, the carpenter. "I have been working on something that you'll like, I fancy, for the last hour. Right glad I was to do it, too, sir, for as I said before I say again, you are a nice sort of a youngster, that you are!"

Our hero looked around the barn and saw hanging in the very center of it one of the finest swings a child could desire. The ropes which formed it were new and strong and were suspended from the huge beam above upon which Jack had been located so recently. The seat of this swing was wide and was made of a great polished hard-pine board.

"This is the rope that Jack climbed up there to fix," said Mr. Evans. "Do you like it, Sonny?"

"Like it? Hurrah! Yes, sir; I do ever so much and I like this barn, too," and Willie waved his arms around to indicate that he included everything in sight in this shout of praise.

"This is the old barn," the carpenter answered. "The other stables are new and so is the garage, but Mr. Thorne wants the old building to stay just as it used to be when he was a boy. It hasn't been remodeled one bit. They keep the hay and

tools and a few farm wagons in here now and that's about all."

Willie gazed around with shining eyes. Two great hay-mows were on either side over long lines of old-fashioned stalls. A deep earthen pit lined with stones and paved with cement sank down to some distance on the right. Here were stored bags of meal and other fodder. The center of the old barn had a rough plank floor.

"Such a jolly place to play," cried out Willie-Frank exultingly.

Sunbeams were sifting down through the cracks and crannies, bathing the wonderful swing in gold, and through the big open doors of the barn crept in sweet odors from garden and meadow.

"Your Uncle wired down early this morning, Baxter told me," went on Mr. Evans; "he ordered me to stop whatever I was doing to put up this plaything for you. You're a lucky little boy, sir, to have an Uncle that's so kind."

"I think he's just the nicest ever!" agreed Willie-Frank heartily. "I love him but I never saw him. Do you know what he looks like?"

"No," laughed Mr. Evans, "I'm a new-comer in town, but folks that remember him as a boy say he was a square, manly chap, sort of quiet, but always pleasant-like. Well, I must be off, Sonny. Have a good time and good luck to you."

"If you hop into the swing I'll give you a push," said friendly Jack.

It did not take the child long to obey and soon, swung by the older boy's sturdy arms, he was

flying out into the sunlight one moment and back into the dusky shadows the next.

At last Willie-Frank, looking down as he swept past the hay-mows, proposed to Jack that they "let the old cat die."

Thinking he was tired, Jack obligingly stepped aside laughing, thus permitting the swing to slacken its speed slowly. Soon the smaller boy jumped to the floor and said, tossing back his troublesome curls:

"Now you get in and I'll push you."

How heartily Jack laughed then. He patted Willie on the head and said:

"That's mighty nice of you. Thank you, I will take a turn at it but don't try to push me and I'll show you a few stunts."

Willie-Frank climbed up and sat on the edge of one of the empty stalls, hugging his knees and looking much pleased over the prospects of Jack's "stunts."

My! What was there the big boy couldn't do? First he stood up in the swing and soon had it swaying back and forth at a great rate, then he seized the strong rope on either side and actually turned heels over head and back to normal position again. Standing on the pine seat of the swing once more he bowed, smiled to an imaginary audience as the bareback riders sometimes do at a circus.

Willie-Frank clapped his hands and shouted:

"Do it again! Do it again!" and finally after

the second performance asked, "Will you show me how to do it? I'd like to try it myself."

Jack, delighted with his little friend's praise, proceeded to do a great many more agile tricks such as climbing up one side of the rope hand over hand and sliding down on the other, bowing jauntily as he reached his starting point safely.

"I must go now," he exclaimed, taking a flying leap out of the swing from quite a height. "But say, don't try to do any of those things I did, will you? You have to learn them little by little, you see. I'm lots older than you. Now if you promise me not to try them when you are alone, I promise you I'll teach you all I know as fast as you can learn it. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes," nodded Willie-Frank and somehow as he looked at him Jack knew that he could be relied on to keep his word honorably.

"Must you go really? Can't you play a little longer with me?" pleaded Willie-Frank as he watched Jack pick up a small box of nails and tuck his hammer into the pocket of his overalls.

"Sorry. I'd love to stay, you know," the other answered regretfully, "but I promised to mend a chicken-house for Mother before dinner so I must be off. I'll come back this afternoon to help Father though, and if I can spare a minute I'll come out here to see you. Want to go as far as the meadow gate with me?"

Willie assented gladly and as the two boys went out into the sunshine Curly and Twinkle ran ahead of them with joyful barks. Twinkle had found

the old barn very interesting and meant to return there sometime soon to investigate a few rat holes which he had discovered, but aristocratic Curly thought out-of-doors much pleasanter than a dusty old place which made one sneeze and cough.

"Well, good-by. We'll have some more fun to-morrow," said the kind, older lad when they reached the meadow gate.

"Good-by," laughed Willie-Frank and then he ran back to Thorne House with Curly and Twinkle frisking about him.

The lunch bell was just ringing as he dashed in at the side entrance, and through the long halls.

Stately Baxter so far forgot his dignity as to smile kindly at the happy, small boy.

CHAPTER IV

BOB AND RAY

THERE was one spot on the Thorne estate from which the village boys of Stedley had never been driven away. This was the old pier which jutted out over the shining waters of Stedley Lake, and therefore the children were free to fish from the landing. Those who could swim dived in perfect freedom from the ancient but sturdy springing-board. The boat-house was unlocked, so offered its hospitable shelter on rainy days.

Willows, maples, elms and pines formed a shady as well as beautiful background. There were plenty of stunted bushes, high weeds and meadow-grass, from which formidable ambush Ted Bemis, as Tecumseh, an Indian brave, waged sham battles upon the forces of the United States Army under General Jimmie Cleary.

Of late, however, the boys under Ted's leadership were busy, whenever play-time brought them to the old battle-field, making "dug-outs" and miniature trenches. They were all members now of one army over which floated from the boat-house the Stars and Stripes. No one was willing to play the part of the enemy these days, so only

imaginary foes were pursued and captured when Ted and Jimmie and their comrades rushed gallantly "over the top."

While Willie-Frank hurried through the halls of Thorne House, two small friends of his tramped up from the village to the pier.

Both carried fishing-rods. Ray Lester's was new, a splendid one, jointed with a reel. He had a shiny tin pail in one hand.

Bobby Evans had a home-made pole, cut and fashioned for him by kind Jack, his elder brother. He swung an old tin can by its rusty cover and whistled merrily.

"Look out there, Bob, or you'll lose your worms," cautioned Ray, peeping into his own little pail to see that his were safe.

"Guess not," laughed Bob pleasantly as he dropped the can down on the landing. "Now, I'll hunt for the hooks," he said, rummaging through his pockets.

Ray forgot the glory of his new rod and gleaming pail, immediately. Bob's pockets always contained so many interesting things. He was piling up quite a collection already on the plank in front of him.

Ray was on his knees by this time among the treasures.

"What's this?" he asked holding up a sticky, pinkish substance.

"Candy, try it," remarked Bob generously.

Ray munched contentedly for a moment and then exclaimed:

"Where did you get such dandy worms?" He was peering into the old tin can now.

"Dug them in the back yard early this morning. Where did you get those?" asked Bob in turn.

"I bought them from Dick Smith for two cents."

"They don't look very juicy," said Bob critically. "You may have some of mine. How's that for a hook?"

Ray was too busy with Bob's jack-knife to hear the question. It was a wonderful knife. Every boy in Bob's circle of friends longed to own its duplicate. It had ever so many blades. Of course, one was broken, but who minds such a small defect in an instrument which contains a cork-screw, a button-hook and a gimlet?

Bob started to refill his pockets. His collection comprised marbles, keys, rusty nails, old strings, a few peanuts, some kernels of popcorn, stamps, a foreign coin, and a small fish hook.

"Whoop," cried Ray, "what's this?"

"Only Toto," answered Bob calmly, as a queer little toad hopped away as fast as he could go.

"Want me to catch him?" asked Ray.

"No, Jack said it was mean to keep him in my stuffy old pockets. I popped him in yesterday. I meant to tame him but I guess he'd rather look out for himself. Let him go. Now let's get started fishing before the other fellows come or they'll drive the fish away fooling and diving."

Soon they were seated side by side at the end

of the pier. Bob was bare-footed. Ray wore tan stockings and sneakers. Bob was an earnest angler if he was small, but Ray liked to loll around and talk. Bob kept his keen blue eyes on his cork and said nothing unless we take into consideration an occasional "sh-sh-sh," by which he urged silence upon Ray.

"Somebody's on the island," whispered Ray at last.

Then Bob did look up.

The island was a pretty green knoll, sheltered by pines situated in the center of the lake. It was a glorious picnic ground. Ellie Cleary, who could pole a raft, row a dory or paddle a canoe quite skillfully, sometimes took the younger set over to enjoy a basket lunch there Saturday afternoons. These excursions were very popular and every small boy and girl loved to receive an invitation from Jimmie Cleary to an island party. The notes were generally decorated and printed by Ellie. Very often they were done on birch bark, rolled up and tied with ribbon grass. Jimmie delivered them in person with a happy smile and eager:

"Hope you'll come!"

We will hear more of these interesting affairs in another chapter.

"Who do you suppose it is?" whispered Bob, not wishing to frighten his fish away by loud talking and yet frankly curious about the person who was moving in and out among the trees on the island.

"It's a man," volunteered Ray, glad of any excitement. "I wonder how he got there though. I don't see any boat on the shore."

"Perhaps it's on the other side," said Bob softly.

"Wish we could go over," grumbled Ray. "It would be lots better fun fishing from the roof of Hermit's Cave."

"Sh-sh-sh-h-h," hissed Bob.

The cork on his line was acting in a very lively fashion. He tried to scramble to his feet to get a stronger hold while he landed his catch, but he bumped against the railing of the pier and stumbled backwards. The fish gave a powerful tug and in a moment would probably have been off into the depths of the lake carrying line, cork, sinker and pole after it, had not two hands gripped Bob's rod just in time.

Steadily the newcomer "pulled in" for a second, then losing his bottled-up patience he swung the line into the air with a howl of delight.

"Look out for the tree," shouted Bob, on his feet again, flushed and eager with excitement.

"Yes, look out!" screamed Ray, dropping his own rod and jumping up and down. "Land him, why don't you? Pshaw! he's got your line all tangled up in those bushes, Bob."

"Just you wait a minute," some one laughed—"zip! I've got it clear, hurrah!"

True enough, the tearing sound of green leaves cut away by the strong fish line was followed by something between a splash and a flop and on the

stout planks of the pier lay Bob's shiny "catch" —a handsome pickerel.

"Say—isn't he a beauty!" gleefully cried the proud fisherman who had rushed to Bob's rescue.

"You bet," agreed Bob heartily, bending over the captive and skillfully unhooking it.

"Oh, hello!" said Ray cordially, after taking a good look at the strange lad who was beaming down at the fish with a radiant face.

It was Willie Thorne.

"Hi-yi!" he cried, "but I'm glad I helped you catch that fish. I've always wanted to go fishing. Isn't it fun?"

He was on his knees beside Bob now and Ray joined them, but while Willie-Frank had eyes only for the unlucky pickerel, his companions could do nothing but stare at him. At last Bob said eagerly:

"I'm glad you came along just then. I'd have lost my fish when I tumbled. Ray never would have caught hold of that rod in time."

"Huh," scoffed Ray good-naturedly. "Guess I would too, Bob Evans." He turned eagerly to Willie-Frank. "I thought you'd break the line when you treed him; didn't you ever go fishing before?"

Our hero turned a somersault before answering and then marched back to look at the pickerel with another merry grin.

"No," he said frankly. "Say, will you fish some more and let me watch you?"

"Here, you use my rod," said Ray generously. "I don't care much about fishing."

"I'll show you how to bait it," offered friendly Bob.

While Ray was explaining the workings of the glittering reel in which Willie-Frank was greatly interested Bob looked up at the sky.

"Hear the thunder?" he exclaimed. "It's getting dark, too. I guess it's going to rain before long."

"Cheers!" cried Willie-Frank. "Fish bite better in the rain, don't they?"

Both little friends laughed. Bob said:

"Not much fun fishing in a thunder and lightning storm."

"You bet it isn't," chuckled Ray.

Willie-Frank sat patiently waiting for the first nibble of Sir Fish, but Bob seemed to have a sailor's instinct about the weather. He knew that a terrible storm was rumbling nearer every moment, so he gathered up his rod and line and can of worms, while Ray took possession of the pickerel.

"Come on," said Bob to Willie-Frank. "See how black the clouds are. If we don't get off the pier soon we'll get a terrible wetting."

Willie reluctantly handed over the handsome rod to its owner and found some comfort when Ray allowed him to carry the one big catch of the afternoon which Bob had strung on a piece of twine.

Just at this moment a flash of lightning seemed

to tear open a pathway straight through the sky. Ray gave a sort of war-whoop and yelling:

"Come on, fellows," rushed off.

The rain came pelting down. The terrible wrath of the storm was suddenly let loose. Bob grasped rod and can with one hand and tugged at Willie-Frank's sleeve with the other:

"Hurry," he shouted.

"Where?" Willie Thorne asked, standing still in the center of the pier holding fast to the pickerel.

"Boat-house," panted Bob.

When they reached Ray's side on the porch of the boat house, however, what was Bob's surprise to find Ray pushing and kicking at the door which had always opened so easily.

"Locked," grumbled Ray, dropping his rod and pulling his cap down over his eyes and turning up the collar of his jacket.

CHAPTER V

HIDE AND SEEK

WILLIE-FRANK stood on the step of the boat-house swinging the pickerel as happily as though little rivers of water were not dripping from every wet curl on his head.

"Stand in here under cover," said Bob, making room for him. "You're getting a terrible ducking there."

"I'll race you up home to the barn," suggested Willie-Frank. "We can play there. I've got a swing. Come on." He started forward with one foot and looked back merrily at his companions to see if they were ready to follow.

Bob and Ray leaped at the chance. The old barn of Thorne House! The wonderful swing Jack had described to Bob at dinner time!

"Hurrah!" both boys shouted.

Ray bounded over the railing, up the tangled slope and over the stone wall which enclosed the meadow. Bob leaped down the steps while Willie-Frank went scampering after Ray. All three boys had forgotten that the paths of Thorne House were forbidden playground for Bob and Ray. Slipping and sliding and jumping up the muddy narrow lane, went Ray. Bob kept to the grass and once tumbled over a bramble. A big crack

of thunder and a blinding flash of lightning made them all stop for a moment. They heard a terrific crash and a splash. Looking back they saw that one of the big trees on the island had fallen and its topmost branches were now in the lake.

"Let's hurry," said Ray. "It isn't much farther now."

Bob, however, stood in the middle of the rain-soaked meadow staring at the island. "I wonder if that man is over there now," he said.

"What man?" asked Willie-Frank with interest.

"Ray and I saw some one moving along the shore when we were fishing. That's a long time ago though. Anyway he could keep dry in Hermit's Cave."

"A cave?" said Willie; "what's it like?"

"I'll show it to you," volunteered Bob. "Jack will take us over in his boat. It's a dandy place."

"When will we go?"

"To-morrow if you want to."

"Guess I would! Thank you."

"I won," yelled Ray's voice in the distance.

Spurred on by this cry, Bob and Willie-Frank soon stood under the protecting roof of the old barn. Ray was already in the swing.

"Watch me," he cried. "I'm going to touch that old lantern up there with my toes."

"You can't do it," declared Bob.

The lantern hung on a wooden peg just above the barn door. Ray called for a push and Bob

and Willie-Frank cheerfully gave him three apiece and then went off to explore the grain pit.

Ray touched the target he had set for himself many times without any applause. Growing weary of such a lonely pastime Ray slackened his speed and jumping to the floor ran over to join his playmates.

"Hi," he called. "What are you doing down there?"

No answer. Not the least tiny sound. The boys were nowhere to be seen.

Ray ran around to the stone steps leading into the pit and set about a thorough search. "Bob," he called, "where are you?" He waited for a moment, only the thunder replied. Ray tried again:

"Bill," he called this time. In a moment of this sort he found Willie-Frank far too long a name for convenience. He climbed up on a sack of grain, he peeped in behind barrels of corn. Where had the fellows gone?

"Hello!" called a familiar voice. Jack Evans was leaning over the railing of the pit. "How do you happen to be in Thorne House barn, Ray?" he asked in surprise. "Aren't you afraid you'll be ordered away?"

"No, I'm not," declared Ray stoutly. "Willie Thorne asked us to come up here with him. We were on the pier fishing. Then it rained. Bob's here, too."

"My Bob?" asked Jack.

"Yes. He and Willie Thorne are hiding on me

somewhere. They were down here just a little while ago and now I can't find them. Hi—fellows, where are you?" he shouted once more. No answer.

Jack laughed. "Say," he said, "is the Thorne boy really in here?"

"Yes," answered Ray.

"All right then," went on Jack. "I'll run back and tell Mr. Baxter, the butler, that he's safe. They are all upset at Thorne House. Rosalie, his nurse, thinks he is lost. They've searched every room in the house for him. When the storm came up Rosalie nearly went crazy. She'll be glad to know he's here. By the way," he added, "pull out those old baskets in the corner, Ray, and I guess you'll see something interesting." And off went Jack through the rain.

Ray obeyed instructions. It was easy to find the baskets but harder to pull them out than he expected.

"Ha! Ha!" he heard and then Bob's familiar chuckle.

The baskets hid a small opening which led into a tunnel reaching under the floor of the barn. Crouched at the entrance were the missing boys. They started to run as Ray stooped down to enter the hiding place.

"I found you!" he shouted after them, gleefully.

"Jack told you where to look, though," said Bob, pausing in his flight.

Willie-Frank raced ahead. Following him the

boys soon entered another pit exactly like the grain bin in size, but as to contents, far more interesting!

The first object that met Willie Thorne's eyes caused him a merry peal of laughter.

"What's the joke?" demanded Bob eagerly.

"Look!" cried the amused lad.

Then Bob and Ray burst out laughing also. Facing them, propped up against the wall, was an ancient scarecrow. He was dressed in a rusty suit of black with great flopping sleeves; through his crownless hat dusty wisps of straw were sticking out. He wore a jaunty red necktie and giddy pink shirt, but his face was the funniest of all. His cheeks were painted brick red. He had two black dots for eyes. A couple of lines represented his nose, his mouth was a long slit cut to look like a very wide smile. A corncob pipe had been placed in one corner of his mouth and as it was upside down it added greatly to the jovial appearance of this laughable object.

Interested as the boys were in this, however, they continued to explore further. What was their delight upon discovering in a dark cobwebby corner an immense, old-fashioned sleigh. Its seat and cushion were gone, but it was piled up with hay and straw. Bob and Willie-Frank climbed into it and were calling "Whoa!" and "Get up!" to an imaginary steed when Ray protested.

"I found you fellows. It's my turn to hide now. Say, will you look for me if I whistle to let you know when I'm ready?"

"Hide and Seek?" asked Willie Thorne. "That's good fun. You go hide too, Bob," he added obligingly. "I'll be the man this time. Hurry up, I'll give you until I count fifty," he began; "one, two——"

"Where's the goal?" asked Ray.

"The swing," suggested Bob.

"Or the sleigh," urged Willie-Frank.

They all decided in favor of the sleigh and Bob and Ray ran off to hide. When Willie counted fifty he began to chant the old familiar:

"Ready or not, you must be caught and-no-fair-hiding-around-my-gold. Ready!" He bounded out of the pit and found himself back of the stalls. He climbed into one of these and out through the opening on the floor of the barn. Up the pegs to the big hayloft he went just in time to see Bob squirm out of the hay and run down the stairs. With much recklessness and to the tune of tearing cloth and swashing buttons Willie slid, climbed and leaped down the post by which he had ascended. Springing up through the stall again he reached the sleigh before Bob, running through the space near the staircase, could outstrip him.

"Caught," laughed Willie, touching the goal and rushing off to locate Ray. This time he hunted high and low from the hay-loft to the grain bins. Then the underground corridor, in all the old carriages stored in the barn, but no Ray. Coming back to consult Bob about it, what was his surprise

to see a smiling Ray seated calmly on the back of the old sleigh kicking his heels.

"Where were you?" asked our hero.

"That's a secret," chuckled Ray. "I'll hide there again."

"Well, hurry up," advised Bob. "I'm it. I'll give you twenty, but I'm going to count fast."

Off his two companions scampered, each in a different direction. Willie-Frank was uncertain just where to go. He had two or three good places in mind. Near the swing he encountered an obstacle to his progress. He stopped and stood as though frozen to the spot, for in front of him, enveloped in an immense green waterproof cape, stood Mrs. Pepper. From behind her best gold-bowed spectacles she was gazing at him severely. A gloomy black veil was tied over her head, her feet were encased in a stout pair of overshoes.

"What do you mean, sir, by running away from your nurse and scaring us all half to death?" she demanded sternly.

Willie-Frank was just about to answer her when he heard Bob's warning cry,—"Are you ready? I'm coming—hippity—hippity—hoop!"

The sound of his running feet could be heard distinctly, and forgetting all fear of Mrs. Pepper and her scolding, out of sheer love of the game, Willie-Frank tried to dart past her, whispering excitedly.

"He's coming. I must hide. I don't want to be caught."

"Who's coming and why should you hide?"

Mrs. Pepper demanded, seizing him by the shoulder and giving him a little shake.

"Bob. We're playing hide and seek. He's the man. Please let go!"

But the struggling small boy felt her hand tighten on his arm and then a strange scene took place. Just before Bob turned the corner near the stall Mrs. Pepper whisked Willie-Frank inside her big green waterproof cape. It was long —it was roomy. Our hero was more safely hidden from view than he could have been in the darkest nook of the old barn.

Bob peering into every corner advanced cautiously. When he was half way across the barn floor he saw Mrs. Pepper. A more thoroughly frightened small boy would be hard to find. Stories of Mrs. Pepper had cast absolute terror over Bob Evans' life ever since he had lived in Stedley. He looked uncomfortable and longed to dash outside. The storm was over and the sun was shining. Bob was no coward and stood his ground bravely.

"Who are you, boy, and what are you doing in this barn?" the housekeeper of Thorne House asked in a crisp tone.

Bob whipped off his cap and answered courteously.

"I'm Bob Evans. We were playing hide and seek. We haven't done any harm."

"Tut-tut," said Mrs. Pepper. "Who is hiding and who is seeking, I'd like to know?"

Her unusual interest in boyish affairs put Bob

on his guard. He must not tell the names of his comrades he decided, but he spoke for himself quite frankly.

"I'm the man. I'm looking for the other fellows."

"Well, look then and be quick about it," Mrs. Pepper commanded impatiently. "You might as well finish your game, I suppose. You can't make much more trouble for me than you have already. But I'll not stand waiting all afternoon, I assure you. I'm here to send you home and I want to do it as fast as I can."

Bob was glad to hurry past this peculiar old lady. He ran toward the tool closet where he had a suspicion Ray's hiding place might be. Before he was many feet away an eager small voice piped out from under the folds of her mackintosh: "Has he gone, Mrs. Pep? Is the coast clear?"

"Yes—run now—be quick."

Willie-Frank darted off like a deer and soon his joyous shout:

"Home safe!" set the echoes of the old barn ringing.

Bob had found Ray and given him warning and two very quiet small boys slid past Mrs. Pepper on their return trip to the goal.

"Mercy!" she ejaculated. "What stupid children! 'Twas not so when I played hide and seek in my youth. Run, one of you boys and have life to you. Isn't any one going to tag the goal but Master William?"

Ray glanced up at her in bewilderment. He too,

knew Mrs. Pepper only as a sort of "bogey-man" personage. Back of her glasses he caught sight of twinkling eyes and quick to sense friendliness he took to his heels and discomfited Bob by touching the goal in triumph.

Mrs. Pepper walked majestically after Bob. She stood looking down into the pit where the old sleigh was stored and she was fumbling in her pocket.

"There," she exclaimed at last, handing Bob a piece of pink peppermint candy. "You are a very slow-motioned child. Perhaps you are not well. Run home now and don't come near the place again. Tell your mother that I think you need some catnip tea. You don't act well. Here's a piece for you, too, young man," she added, addressing Ray. "Run along now and don't throw stones at the birds. Come here, Master William."

Willie-Frank scrambled up to her side. "Please may the boys come back and play with me tomorrow?" he pleaded with a sunny smile on his upturned face.

Mrs. Pepper stiffened. "Master William," she said severely, "never, never tease me for anything. Your Uncle wouldn't like it. You are to march straight into the house, sir, and be quiet until tea time. You are a naughty little boy."

Willie-Frank gasped in dismay. Could this be the same kindly person who had hidden him under her raincoat?

"You called me Mrs. Pep a few moments ago. How dare you shorten my name, sir!"

"Daddy used to call you Mrs. Pep when he talked about you," Willie said sadly. He was very much disappointed.

"Did your father speak to you of me, sir?" the old lady asked, her tone a shade less disagreeable than before.

"Yes, but I didn't know that you were the Mrs. Pep he meant until you hid me out there. He said his nurse used to hide him when he was a little boy and played hide and seek with Uncle Gerald. Weren't you the one he meant?"

"I was," Mrs. Pepper answered gently, "and a nicer little lad never lived than Master Donald, unless it was Master Gerald himself. I'm glad your father remembered me, Master William. I was very fond of him and perhaps I will be of you, too, if you behave better in future. Come now."

She marched off and Willie obediently followed her. He could see no trace of Ray or Bob. They had made their escape speedily. Half way up the gravel walk, however, he heard footsteps pursuing him. He turned. Bob stood breathless before him holding out the pickerel.

"It's—for you," he panted, a rosy smile lighting up his hot little face as he slipped the string into Willie's hand. Then he flew just as Mrs. Pepper looked around to see what the latest disturbance could be.

"What is that?" she asked in her crossest voice.

"Our pickerel," Willie exclaimed joyfully, giving it a twirl in the air. "Bob gave it to me. Isn't he splendid?"

"There—there, don't throw the horrid creature up into my face," cried Mrs. Pepper, "and you can't bring it into the house. Eugene," she called, to a person who came hurriedly around the corner of the house:

"Take this fish to the kitchen and if it is really fresh and fit to eat, tell Dorcas to——," but she stopped quite suddenly and gave an exclamation of surprise, for it was not Eugene who was advancing towards them.

CHAPTER VI

A RIDE

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, Mrs. Pepper," a cool, precise voice said. "Is this the little boy?"

Mrs. Pepper stiffened and her tone fairly bristled with reproof, as she replied:

"How do you do, Mr. Stanley? This is Master William Thorne." Her words sounded as though she wanted Mr. Stanley to understand that Willie was some important personage, not merely "the little boy."

Mr. Stanley gave a short laugh, but it was such a laugh, a queer laugh, sounding more like a sneeze or a cough, that Willie-Frank wrested his eyes from his beloved fish and gazed at the stranger in boyish wonderment.

Mr. Stanley was a very tall, thin young man with a very pale face, and a very high brow. He wore a very large pair of spectacles with tortoise shell rims. He patted our hero on the head kindly and smiled in a way that made him look more solemn than before.

What a queer person he seemed!

"How-do-you-do, Master William Thorne?" he said gravely.

"I'm quite well, thank you," answered Willie-Frank politely.

Mr. Stanley gave another odd laugh.

"Mr. Thorne has sent me for Master William," he said, addressing Mrs. Pepper once more. "He is to come up to the city at once to see his Uncle. I have the automobile at the side entrance. Will you get him ready as soon as possible?" He glanced disapprovingly at Willie's soiled, torn suit and ragged knees.

Willie-Frank smiled at him in friendly fashion. Another automobile ride! The city! And Uncle Gerald! What a delightful set of surprises!

"Is Mr. Gerald so ill, then?" exclaimed Mrs. Pepper anxiously.

"No, not exactly," Mr. Stanley replied calmly, "but he is having great trouble with his knee. He injured it while on one of his inland expeditions. Proper medical treatment could not be secured at the time and he has suffered more or less with it ever since. Stepping from the train in Boston a few nights ago he wrenched it again quite severely. He had hoped to be able to walk within a day or two, but the doctor has forbidden him to attempt such a thing for several weeks. He is eager to see Master William and since he cannot come home as soon as he planned, he wants the child with him in Boston."

"Poor boy—poor boy," murmured Mrs. Pepper with motherly sympathy.

Willie-Frank decided that he loved her. She had hidden him in the barn and she was sorry for Uncle Gerald! Oh, he was quite sure now that she wasn't like the witches in the fairy tales! He

longed to ask Mr. Stanley questions about the wonderful trip they were going to take! He had seen many large cities, but Boston was not among them. What fun was ahead for him! He wanted to jump up and down and shout.

"Come, Master William," said Mrs. Pepper, after a little more conversation with Mr. Stanley, who finally disappeared in the direction of the garage.

For half an hour Mrs. Pepper and Rosalie were busy preparing the boy for his journey and when he marched down the stairs to the dining-room, where a supper was served for the travelers, by Eugene, he saw Mr. Stanley pacing up and down on the wide front veranda. Mr. Stanley saw a small boy with shining face and neatly brushed curls, in a blue Russian suit, a wide white collar and flaming red tie. Rosalie followed him bearing his gray coat and cap. Baxter brought up the rear with a suit case.

Mr. Stanley tossed away his cigar and entered the hall, smiling very kindly at the lad.

"I suppose you are pleased with the idea of a long ride by motor," he said when they were seated at the table.

"Yes, sir," our hero answered shyly, but with a radiant smile.

"Your Uncle is very kind," continued Mr. Stanley. "His one thought is to make your life as happy as possible."

"I like him," began Willie-Frank, "I love him," he added, gaining in eloquence as the friend-

liness of Mr. Stanley's face and manner put him at his ease.

"That's right," the gentleman said approvingly. "Love is really the best way of all to thank a person for kindness."

"Is Uncle Gerald tall?" questioned Willie eagerly.

"Yes."

"Does he laugh a great deal?"

Mr. Stanley smiled rather ruefully. "Yes, again. In fact he laughs most of the time at himself, at me, and at the world in general."

"That's nice," said Willie-Frank, joyously. "Daddy laughed a lot, too. No one else I ever knew did. I like laughy people, don't you?"

"Well, I certainly like Mr. Thorne," the gentleman answered. "Now, if you are ready I think we will prepare for the road."

"Good-by, Eugene," cried the boy, dashing back into the dining-room ten minutes later, tripping, as he ran, over his long gray dust coat.

"Good-by, little sir," answered Eugene heartily. "We will be glad to see you come home again, but meanwhile have a good time."

"Yes, thank you, I will."

"Here is a little package Mammy Dorcas the cook sent you. Open it when you come to a hungry place on the road."

Willie laughed at Eugene's funny way of expressing it and begged him to thank kind Mammy Dorcas.

"Coming?" called Mr. Stanley from the hall.

"Good-by, Rosalie," shouted Willie-Frank, throwing his arms around his kind nurse with a "big bear" hug.

"Good-by, dear," she whispered, "here's something to play with at bedtime to-night," and she thrust a knobby bundle into Willie's hands. It was a funny red jumping-jack.

"Good-by, Master William. I hope you will behave in a gentlemanly way and not annoy your good Uncle by noise and naughtiness," said Mrs. Pepper severely.

"Good-by," answered Willie gayly. "Thank you for hiding me under your cloak in the barn."

His shrill young voice carried the words distinctly to the ears of Rosalie, Eugene and Baxter. Even Mr. Stanley, who was descending the steps, could hear. Mrs. Pepper flounced away after trying to silence him with a severe "hush." Willie looked after her very much perplexed.

What a strange old lady she was! Didn't she want any one to know that she played with him in the barn? When he looked around and saw a smile on every face, however, he brightened up again, shook hands with Baxter and hopped, skipped and jumped after Mr. Stanley. Eugene had told him that Mr. Stanley was his Uncle's secretary.

"Would you like to sit beside me?" asked that gentleman pleasantly.

"Yes, sir."

"Then hop in."

Baxter, after saying a kind farewell, shut the

door with a snap and Willie-Frank was whirled away, but at a turn of the drive he turned to wave his cap to the butler.

"This isn't quite so big a car as Mr. Jake's, is it?" remarked Willie in a friendly tone to Mr. Stanley.

"Do you mean the machine in which you rode yesterday?" asked his companion.

"Yes, it is brown and shiny. It has a monogram on the doors."

"Do you know what the letters were?"

"Oh, yes—W. F. T., just like the letters of the monogram of my name, but Jake didn't know what they stood for. He said they ought to be G. F. T. for Uncle Gerald's."

"Ah, so you are not aware that the wonderful, shiny brown car is yours?"

"Mine?" shrieked Willie-Frank, standing up in his excitement. "How could it be mine? Do little boys have autos all their own?"

"No, not many, I'll admit, but you happen to be unusually fortunate. Mr. Thorne calls that machine yours and that is why your monogram adorns it."

Willie suffered for a moment from complete "loss of tongue." He sat back on the seat and looked ahead of him with eyes that were very big and bright.

Oh, how good Uncle Gerald was and how very, very happy was Willie-Frank!

"May I take all the boys out riding?" he asked

at last, clutching Mr. Stanley's arm with both hands.

"I suppose so. Give me warning when you intend to spring at me again, young man. We nearly sent the car into the ditch just then."

The stillness of the spring-time evening was broken by Willie's peal of merry laughter. Mr. Stanley gave a short laugh, too. They were skimming along the village street now. At last, Mr. Stanley brought the car to a full stop in front of a home-like looking, old-fashioned house.

"Dr. Cleary lives there," said Mr. Stanley, quietly. "He has a package to send to your Uncle so we must stop and get it."

Before Mr. Stanley could sound his motor-horn, a short, brown-haired man came hurrying down the steps.

To Willie this little brown gentleman appeared very interesting. He had brown eyes, a brown beard, a brown face and a brown suit. He smiled in a way that was perfectly delightful, winning for himself a straight road to the child's heart.

"I see that you do not intend to keep Gerald waiting long, Stan," he said pleasantly. "Why, I have barely had time to collect my scattered senses and here you are back again. So this is Don's boy. How-do-you-do, Willie Thorne? I am very happy to know you, my boy."

A kind hand was extended to grasp Willie's small one.

"This is Dr. Cleary, William," said Mr. Stan-

ley. "He was your Uncle's chum in boyhood days and knew your Father also."

"Are you Jimmie's Father?" Willie asked eagerly.

Both men laughed, but before either of them could answer, a lady came slowly out of the house leading a small boy by the hand. He looked uncomfortable in a suit which was very new, in a collar which was very stiff, in a pair of shoes which were very creaky. His brown hair was smoothly brushed under a trim blue cap, his face was very clean, his manners very quiet, until a shrill young voice cried out:

"Hi, Jimmie! See, there is Jim, Mr. Stanley!"

Then Jimmie's face lighted up with pleasure. " 'Lo there!" he answered. Then turning to his mother, "that's Willie-Frank, Mamma. See!"

Our hero was standing up in the machine by this time, his face all aglow with delight. Mrs. Cleary came swiftly across the sidewalk:

"Good evening, Mr. Stanley," she said. "Good evening, little Willie. Jimmie has told me a great deal about you. You must be a very nice little boy."

Willie-Frank raised his cap and smiled and bowed in exact imitation of Daddy's courtly manners.

Mrs. Cleary was gentle, sweet and motherly. "You will be very careful of my boy, please, Mr. Stanley," she said wistfully. Her arm was around Jimmie's neck, her fond hand patted his cheek and Jimmie, although he smiled in friendli-

ness at the boy in the automobile, was not ashamed to cuddle up close to this best of all friends.

"You may trust him to me absolutely, Mrs. Cleary," Mr. Stanley said respectfully. "Mr. Thorne deeply appreciates your kindness in parting with your son for his sake. We will be very careful of the little lad."

"Good-by, darling," whispered Mrs. Cleary, kissing Jimmie fondly.

"Good-by, son," said Dr. Cleary cheerily, as he swung Jimmie into the air, kissed him and seated him safely in the tonneau of the automobile.

"Mr. Stanley, is Jimmie coming, too?" screamed Willie-Frank, clutching Mr. Stanley's arm again with a sturdy grip.

Mr. Stanley answered kindly: "Yes. Mr. Thorne sent me to ask Mrs. Cleary and the Doctor if they would permit him to enjoy the company of the boy for a week or two. I called here on my way to Thorne House."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried the child, waving his cap. "Please, may he sit in here with us?"

"Would you like to, James?" asked Mr. Stanley.

"Yes, sir," answered Jimmie.

Dr. Cleary lifted him over the back of the seat, and clasping each other tightly by the hand the two boys sat and smiled first at each other and then at Mrs. Cleary.

"Good-by," called lively Ellie from the doorway as the machine moved slowly away.

"Good-by," said Mr. Stanley.

"Good-by," said Willie-Frank.

Not a word from Jimmie! He was swallowing a big lump in his throat. He liked to ride in automobiles. Oh, yes! He liked Willie-Frank, oh, yes! But he was going away from home for the first time without one member of his own dear family. He gulped bravely. There was some one dearer to him than all the fun in the world. To her through the twilight shadows floated back his farewell. "Good-by, Mother. Please don't cry. Good-by!"

Mr. Stanley feared that Jimmie's homesickness might dampen the spirits of both young travelers, so he tried to think of some remark that might interest them. What was his satisfaction to discover that Jimmie Cleary was a real little man about such matters. Having disposed of the second uncomfortable lump in his throat, the boy was laughing and chatting pleasantly with Willie-Frank.

"You must know all the short cuts in this part of the country, James," said the gentleman. "Is there any quicker way of reaching the state road than the one we are taking?"

Yesterday Jimmie had acted as guide for Mr. Jake. To-night he was called upon to fill the same office for another "man at the wheel." Willie listened breathlessly.

"Yes, sir. Lots of the motorcycle men and fellows with racing cars go through Piney Road. It's cooler and not so hilly."

"Good!" cried Mr. Stanley. "Now just where is it?"

"See where the big elm comes out into the street? Well, it's first turn after that. Yes, right around here, sir. Look out, the corner's sharp." Jimmie stood up and gave the directions with keen enjoyment.

"Thanks. Do I keep straight ahead all the way?"

"Until you come to the lake, then switch off to the right into the Lake Drive. That will bring you right out on the boulevard."

Mr. Stanley carefully steered the machine into the shadows of Piney Road, and Jimmie turned to ask Willie eagerly, "Where are your dogs? Did you leave them up at Thorne House?"

"Yes. Mr. Stanley told me they weren't invited. I'm afraid Curly will starve unless I go back soon."

"Why?" questioned Jimmie, round-eyed with curiosity.

"He doesn't eat if I'm not around. He lies down just as if he felt sick and whines or else growls at every one who comes near him."

"Don't fret about him," advised Mr. Stanley. "He must get over such nonsense as soon as possible. Why, a dog of that sort is a perfect nuisance."

"Curly isn't a nuisance, really," declared Willie loyally.

"He's a beauty," commended Jimmie, "and the other little fellow is smart as can be. I wish I had a dog."

"What kind do you like best?" asked Willie-Frank.

"A bull dog! Just like Dick Smith's! His name is Punch."

"How big is he?"

Jimmie illustrated the measurements of Punch with his hands: "He's about so long—and so high and wide as that—see! And he has teeth that show all the time, even when he's not cross."

Willie was greatly interested in the monster, and Jimmie was starting another speech of praise, when a lurch of the machine as it was guided into Lake Drive bounced the two lads against the side of the car. Then the auto came to a sudden stop.

"Too bad I had to jolt you so," the gentleman said kindly.

Both boys laughed merrily and assured him:

"It was good fun."

"Look," he said. "Do you see anything odd off there in the center of the lake? Watch closely for a moment."

Wide-eyed, eager for adventure, Willie and Jimmie stared across the water. Twilight was falling softly now. Only the outline of the island could be seen through the shadows. A fog was also slowly settling over the lake, rendering the outlook dimmer each moment. The three motorists waited patiently. At last Mr. Stanley exclaimed, "There! Do you see it? To me, it looks like a signal, as though some one might be in distress over on that island. Are there any boats to be had near by, my boy?"

"Eben Hollister lives down this way. He has a dory and a raft."

"Very well, let us go to Eben's with all possible speed," said the gentleman swiftly starting the machine into motion.

"There goes another beacon, see!" cried out Willie-Frank, hopping up and down in his excitement.

Mr. Stanley reached across the back of the seat and clutched our hero, saying pleasantly:

"Sit down, William. If we want to help our Robinson Crusoe off his island it will not hasten matters any to be obliged to stop and pick you up by the wayside."

But events of thrilling interest were taking place. Willie could not keep still. At regular intervals what appeared to be a blazing torch flared in the sky, falling almost immediately into the lake with a fizzling sound.

"Perhaps some of the boys from the military school are camping out over there," suggested Jimmie.

"Bob saw a man on the shore this afternoon just before the thunder storm came up," added Willie-Frank.

"Oh, so there was some one there during the storm?" said Mr. Stanley very gravely. "A tree was struck this afternoon. I saw it fall as I ran the car for shelter under the sheds near the Fair grounds. I sincerely hope no one was injured as it crashed down."

"Bob said that the man could keep dry in Her-

mit's Cave," explained Willie. "Maybe he was in there when the tree fell."

"I wonder why he doesn't swim across?" murmured Jimmie.

"Whoop there! Don't run me down," called a new voice sharply from the dusk of the roadside.

CHAPTER VII

TO THE RESCUE

"WHO are you?" demanded Mr. Stanley.

"It's Ted Bemis," shouted Jimmie, delightedly. "Hi, Ted! Where are you?"

"That you, Jim Cleary?"

"Yes."

"Whee! Stop that! Want to blind a fellow," sputtered Ted, as Mr. Stanley sent the far-reaching glare of his immense searchlight full upon the lonely stretch of road and the ragged boyish figure. All could see the lad clearly now. His tattered cap was pulled down over his brow—he carried a huge market basket on his arm.

Ted, for his part, blinked like a cross little owl at the touring-car and its occupants.

Mr. Stanley addressed him kindly. "Did you see the signals from the island, my boy?"

"Yes," answered Ted gruffly, shifting his load from one hand to the other. "If it wasn't for the plaguey old basket I could get along faster. When I get down to old Eb's, I'm going to get a boat and row over to see what's the fuss."

"See! There's another!" yelled Jimmie and Willie in chorus, as a specially bright, fiery brand swept skyward. Much spluttering followed its descent into the water.

"Are we near the place you are making for, Ted?" asked Mr. Stanley in a winning tone of comradeship.

"Eb's, you mean? Yes, sir. It's just a little stretch ahead."

"Swing your basket into the car then and hop in yourself. We are on our way to this Mr. Eben's also to get a boat and play life-savers. Will you let us cross with you, provided Mr. Eben is willing?"

"You mean go over to the island with me? Sure, Mister; but say, I never rode in an automobile before. Do you want me to, honest?"

"I generally say exactly what I mean, my young friend. There! In with the basket! That's right! Now yourself! Perhaps you can't manage that catch on the door. Let me assist you!"

Mr. Stanley courteously reached over to unfasten the snap but Ted exclaimed joyfully:

"Let me, Mister, please! I've got the trick. See!"

"Excellent," said the gentleman brightly. "Now, forward once more."

"My, but this is swell!" declared Ted fervently as the car whirred on its way and he bounced happily in solitary state on the rear seat. Unfortunately, his high glee caused him to swing his feet back and forth restlessly, and the stillness of the night air was disturbed quite unexpectedly by a queer, snarling sound.

"What's that!" cried Ted, leaping up.

"There's something under the seat sure as can be."

"Perhaps it's a wild-cat," exclaimed Jimmie, eagerly.

Down on his knees went dauntless Ted to peer underneath the leather curtain. Not the wisest way in the world to locate a wild-cat, as perhaps "Uncle Gerald" could have told him had he been of the party!

"What next?" laughed Mr. Stanley, bringing the car to a stop for the third time since entering Lake Drive.

There was a scramble, a thud, a gasp from Ted —a snarl, and then, a whimpering little whine of relief and joy.

"It's Curly. Hurrah!" shrieked Willie-Frank, holding a woolly little ball up triumphantly. The scramble and the thud had occurred when Willie, suspecting that it was his pet, dived impulsively over the back of the seat, falling upon prostrate Ted with all his sturdy strength. The gasp was given when Ted, almost breathless, wondered if another wild-cat was on top of him. The snarl and the whimper had been Curly's addition to the performance.

Jimmie chimed in by laughing heartily and Ted was soon doing the same.

"May he stay, Mr. Stanley, please!" begged Willie-Frank, pushing his pet against that gentleman's shoulder beseechingly.

"Wasn't he cute to hide under the seat so he wouldn't be left behind! I always knew Curly

was smart. He can sleep with me," he continued eagerly. "He wouldn't make a bit of noise or trouble, would you, Curly? Speak up, sir!"

"Yap—yap!" responded Curly decidedly and coaxingly caressed the back of Mr. Stanley's ear with his little pink tongue.

Mr. Stanley immediately joined in the mirth of Jim and Ted. Truly this Curly was a funny, winsome little rogue!

"Yes—yes, by all means let him stay. Now that he is here it can't be helped. Sit down beside Ted and don't dare to breathe again, any of you, for I'll not stop this time for an earthquake," Mr. Stanley answered jokingly as he sent the car forward at a whizzing pace.

Soon a tiny glimmer of light could be seen ahead among the trees. When the automobile reached the gateway of Eben's farm-house, a tall, lanky figure came slowly down the path.

"Hello! Is that you, Ted?" some one called harshly.

"Yes," answered Ted, but much of the happiness had died out of his rough young voice.

"What kept you so long? Who's this you're with? An ortymobile! Well—I never!"

Ted was busy lifting up the heavy basket, but Mr. Stanley spoke agreeably:

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Hollister?"

"Who are you?" asked the man, gruffly.

"A Westerner," responded Mr. Stanley with a low laugh. "We haven't the Yankee way of

answering one question by asking another. However, it doesn't matter," he added, "what I want is a place to put my machine for a few moments, and a boat. I think some one is in distress over there on the island. We wish to reach them as soon as possible."

"Well—it's funny, sure enough. Eben's just gone down to row across, because he thought the same as you, but I say 'tain't no such thing. It's some of them Academy boys skylarking. They ought to be put to work, the whole of them. They're an idle, good-for-nothing set. See here, you, Ted—what do you mean by killing time in a swell chap's ortymobile when I send you on an errand—hey?"

The man's tone sounded so threatening that Mr. Stanley interfered:

"Nonsense, sir. The child had a heavy basket to carry. He came quicker by riding than he ever could on foot. Ah! this is a driveway, I see. Stay where you are, Ted."

Honk—honk! went the horn in warning. The gruff person stepped back and the car glided safely under the shelter of maple trees into the barnyard adjoining the house.

"Now, boys, come quickly. Perhaps we can find Mr. Eben in time. By the way, I must have some one in charge of the car. Who lives here besides Mr. Eben?"

"Hetty," shouted Jimmie, clearly. "There she is now. Hello, Hetty!"

A cheerful looking woman appeared in the doorway, carrying a lamp in her hands.

"Why, Jimmie Cleary, what are you doing away down here?" she demanded.

Jimmie smiled in a very friendly way. Many a fishing trip had Hetty made happy for him by arming him with doughnuts or pie or cookies as he passed her lonely cottage. But Mr. Stanley had a way of keeping the conversation limited to himself this evening, so great was his hurry. He spoke rapidly and soon had explained matters to the kindly housekeeper who proved to be Eben's sister.

"Yes, of course I'll keep an eye out for your car, sir, but there is no danger. No one comes along here much after nightfall. If you cross the road and follow the path through the thicket you'll probably find Eb, and if he has sailed why, help yourself to the raft. Are you going along, too, Mr. Frost?" she asked, addressing the tall, lanky man, but with none of the friendliness in her tone that she had used to Mr. Stanley.

"No, I'm not. I'm going to push on to town. I only waited to see how long it took this lazy fellow to do an errand. Drop that basket now, you Ted, and trot home and get to bed and see that you are up early to-morrow and at that weeding, or you'll hear from me when I get back from town."

"Oh, please, Mr. Frost, can't I go to the island with the rest?" pleaded Ted. All roughness had disappeared from his voice. It was very wistful now.

"Run along, boys. I'll attend to this," said Mr. Stanley, sharply. "Yes, you, too, Ted. If you don't find Eben, wait for me."

Ted hesitated. Mr. Frost began to speak angrily to Mr. Stanley, but Willie, tugging at Ted's arm, said, "Come on!" Mr. Stanley made a few remarks in a low voice.

"Go ahead," Mr. Frost said unexpectedly. "Probably the gentleman is willing to pay you for your time, but run home as soon as you're through—do you hear?"

Even in the darkness honest Ted could feel the color mounting to the roots of his hair. Shame for the hateful word "pay" rendered him dumb and uncomfortable.

"It will be quite all right, Ted. Run along; I understand," said Mr. Stanley's kind, big-brotherly voice, and poor Ted flashed up a grateful smile at his splendid new champion. Mr. Stanley had placed his hand on Ted's shoulder as he spoke and something in his touch made the lad feel that he really and truly did understand that though Ted was poor and homeless, he did not want money, but friendship.

"Thanks," mumbled Ted tersely, then bounded off after his chums.

Meanwhile, Jimmie had reached the rude planks which Eben used as a boat landing. By shouting lustily he soon discovered that slow-motioned Mr. Hollister was not far from the shore. His easy-going voice called back jocularly:

"Take the raft, young 'un, if you want to. I'm

not a-coming back for nobody. There's nothing serious the matter over yonder. I'm only going over to see what mischief the chap is up to. If any one wants to come with me, they'll have to swim out here and scramble in."

Eben was only joking, but one member of the party took him seriously. A quick splash followed his words.

"Who's that?" demanded Eben. "Did some one fall?"

"Yes, Curly," exclaimed Ted in wild excitement. "Come back. He'll drown. Come back!"

"A boy, is it?" demanded Eben, with more life in his utterances now.

"No, Curly's a dog," chimed in Jimmie, "but get him, will you? Where is Willie Thorne? He'll go wild if his dog is drowned."

"It's not a dog," yelled Ted, throwing off his coat. "It's the little chap himself." Ted had adopted the name of the poodle as an appropriate one for Willie-Frank because of his hair, hence the mistake on Jimmie's part.

Another splash! Ted had dived after our hero into the lake.

"Sho! There's another one to fish out now! Boys sartainly are the limit," growled Eb, starting back to the rescue.

"Here I am! You said I could ride if I swam out to you! Hurry up, Ted," said a rather choky voice.

Now that the fog had rolled silently away, under the clearer light of the stars, Mr. Hollister

saw ten wet but determined little fingers gripping the side of his craft. A mop of dripping curls appeared also.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "A little girl! Where in the world did you drop from?" As he spoke he reached out a strong arm and swung the child into the boat. Instantly Willie-Frank shook himself like a small dog and Eben burst out laughing.

"That's right. Don't mind me! Ho—ho—get me just as wet as you like! Here, Ted—what a silly chap you were to dive before there was any need." And to the accompaniment of these words the good-natured farmer hoisted Ted aboard also.

"Say, you did give me a scare!" chattered Ted, regarding Willie with mingled reproof and admiration.

"Why?" demanded the smaller. "I can swim —like a fish," he wound up with proudly.

"Ho, ho! Guess you can. Get down there under those robes, both of you, quick! I don't want any chills. Here's my sweater. You put it on, curly head, and mind you, keep still. For a little tad, you're altogether too spry."

Eben began to row with long strokes now, and Ted cuddled down under the assortment of robes which had evidently been brought along in expectation of trouble on the island.

The night air was chill and the water had been very cold. Willie shivered slightly but could not be induced to curl up beside Ted at the bottom of the boat until Eben threatened to take them both back to the shore at once.

"But I want to sit and watch you," Willie protested. "I want to be ready to hop out when we get there."

"Hop down and do as I told you," repeated Mr. Hollister firmly.

Ted reached out and caught his friend by the ankle and that settled matters. With a bounce that nearly upset both the boatman and the boat, Willie fell into the cozy nest Ted had fixed for him at his side.

"All right out there?" called Mr. Stanley, anxiously, from the pier.

"Yes," shouted back Eben.

When Mr. Stanley had hurried through the bushes shortly after Willie's leap into the lake, Jimmie told him what had happened. Needless to say, that gentleman became greatly excited, and it was not until Willie himself answered to his call that Mr. Stanley resumed his customary air of calmness.

"We will follow on the raft," he shouted.

"Help yourself," rejoined Mr. Hollister.

"Guess that man on the island thinks we are never coming," said Jimmie, seating himself Turkish fashion on the raft, his eyes glued on the shore towards which Mr. Stanley was now swiftly poling.

"Surely the others have reached there before this," exclaimed his companion, pausing to peer in the direction taken by Eben's boat.

Across the shining lake came a duet from Willie and Ted:

"All-right-over-there. Coming?"

"They've landed," cried Jimmie jubilantly.

"Yes! Coming!" shouted Mr. Stanley.

Soon Jimmie bounded on to the sloping shore of the island, but turned to help Mr. Stanley pull the raft up to a safe mooring.

"Thanks," said his tall companion, kindly, "but I can manage this nicely, my boy. You call out and try to locate the others."

Jimmie obeyed. "Hermit's Cave! It's around this side," advised the boy, when the sound of Ted's answering yell reached his ears.

"Ah, here are the remnants of some of the torches," said Mr. Stanley, quietly.

"Where?" asked Jimmie, stumbling in his eagerness. "Whew! But that's hot!" he then exclaimed, clapping his hands together. He was kneeling in a heap of dying embers, over which he had tripped.

"The fire at which the torches were kindled!" ejaculated Mr. Stanley, examining the spot.

"Oh, look—look!" cried Jimmie, springing to his feet. "See what's back of the bushes! Look!"

The cause of his excitement proved to be a great white object tipped on one side, which had the appearance in the silvery moonlight of an immense bird with a trailing, broken wing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ISLAND BY MOONLIGHT

"IT'S an airship," crowed Jimmie, pushing forward through the intervening bushes.

"There's a man hurt. He's fainted," panted Ted, bounding into view. "Eben, Curly and I helped him get into Hermit's Cave."

"Curly?" exclaimed Mr. Stanley impatiently. "Is that dog over here, too?"

"Nope. It's Will Thorne I mean."

The gentleman laughed, but Ted's teeth were chattering. He was dragging one of the heavy gray robes from Eben's boat after him.

"Here, my boy," said Mr. Stanley hurriedly, but kindly, as he whipped off his warm tweed jacket. "Drop that blanket and slip into this. Now the blanket again. That's right. Now roll up in it and lie down beside this fire. You must keep as warm as possible until you can change those wet clothes of yours. Where is William?"

"In the cave," answered Ted. "But say, Mister, I don't want to lie here like a baby. I'm going, too. I want to help!"

"You must obey orders, my lad, else you are no true soldier. I'll be back presently. Come, James. The airship will keep. Sit down beside Ted and get up a good blaze. I appoint you Cap-

tain and we may all need your camp fire shortly, so tend it faithfully."

Promptly Jimmie came crashing back, eager to tell Ted of the wonderful "Plane" which he had just examined as closely as circumstances permitted.

"It's a Flier, sure enough," ejaculated Ted, raising his head to peer with interest at the luckless airship. "Say, that chap must have had a mighty bad toss, Jim. He looks awfully battered to me, but he's game! As game as—as Tucker."

Ted, in search of a hero whose measure of bravery Jimmie could properly appreciate, finally settled upon the famous football favorite of Stedley.

Mr. Stanley walked rapidly away in the direction from whence Ted had come. He soon discovered an entrance, partly concealed by brambles, leading into a low-vaulted hut. From a rude bracket on the damp wall swung Eben's lantern. Eben himself was bending over a prostrate figure on the earthy floor.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Hollister?" demanded Mr. Stanley. Then, in the same breath, "Where is William?"

"Here I am. Mr. Eben and I are giving first aid," chirped Willie, happily, from the dark corner where he was kneeling.

The injured man moaned feebly and opened his eyes. They were dark, mischievous eyes. He turned them in search of the child.

"First aid!" he murmured, with a smile flick-

ering across his drawn face. "Some boy, you are! Tell—me—your—name."

"Willie Thorne. Are you much hurt, sir?"

Mr. Stanley swiftly stooped over the sufferer and with quick, skillful fingers made a hurried examination. The man winced several times and finally spoke:

"It's the shoulder, isn't it? Bad break, do you think?"

Mr. Stanley raised the left arm gently. Suddenly he tried a quick experiment. The man bit his underlip in an effort to restrain a cry of pain. Then he raised his merry eyes with a pathetic twinkle in them to his rescuer's face, attempted to say, "Quit that," and fainted.

"Pretty much broken up, eh?" commented Eben.

"I can't tell just how serious it is at present, but I'm afraid there are internal injuries, also," muttered Mr. Stanley. "We must get him across as soon as possible. Now, what is the quickest way to do it and save him pain?"

"I'll carry him to the boat and keep him propped up against me as comfortable as may be, while you row," drawled the farmer, but there was a ring of strong reliance in his slow voice.

His companion, glancing at the great broad-shouldered giant, who had risen now to his feet, appreciated his strength and willingness, but said gravely:

"He is thin and wiry but his muscles are like steel. He will be a heavy load for both of us in

the effort we must make to raise him again without too severe a jolt."

"I was thinking of making a stretcher of this," said Eben, lifting a piece of sail-cloth, "but somehow I think I could carry him in my arms more gentle-like. I often toted wounded men off the battlefield."

"Oh, are you a soldier?" asked Willie-Frank impulsively.

Both men had forgotten him until he spoke.

"Too bad we've got those pesky boys along," grumbled Eben. "Trouble enough and to spare without their mischief. As for you, young Quicksilver Johnnie, you keep as quiet as a mouse until we give you orders!" He glared at Willie very sternly, but as it was dark in the cave, only the rebuke in his voice reached the lad.

Mr. Stanley, reminded of Willie's presence and his duty in that regard, reached across the aviator's form and lifted the child up in his arms.

"Why, William, you are frozen," he exclaimed, feeling of the boy's dripping clothing beneath the old red sweater of Mr. Hollister, which Willie was wearing.

"And barefooted!" he continued, for our hero had kicked off slippers and socks before diving.

"I'm not so very cold," remonstrated Willie-Frank.

"Run outside as fast as you can," said Mr. Stanley, crisply. "Wrap this around you," handing him another of the gray blankets which Eben had brought with him, "and lie down near the

fire that James is stoking. Remain there until I call you."

When Willie had disappeared he turned again to the farmer:

"Would it be much of a pull to Thorne House?" he asked.

Eben pushed back his cap and grunted: "Thorne House?" he said at last. "Yes, sir, considerable and besides it's no go. It's to my place or nothing for me. It's nearer, and Hetty's one fine nurse. I can get Doc Cleary on the telephone in no time and there's room and to spare for all of us."

"Good!" said Mr. Stanley, not stopping to argue that "room and to spare" was assured at Thorne House, too, with far more conveniences than Eben's home on Lake Drive could possibly have. The fact that Lake Drive was the nearest point to reach settled matters without further comment.

"Ted can pole the other two chaps back on the raft," went on Eben; "he's as steady as a man, Ted is. Send 'em off. Then we'll get busy here, Mister. Tell 'em to run up and tell Hetty that it was an accident. I reckon she has her best room ready anyhow. She was sure some one was hurt when she saw those lights."

Mr. Stanley summoned Ted in this way:

"Ted, we must rely on your help at once," as he hurried out to the camp fire.

There was a smothered answer of some sort from the huge mountain of gray blanket on the

shore, a kicking free of bare, brown legs—then a sleek, black head appeared and soon Ted struggled to his feet.

"Yes, sir. You can count on me sure. What can I do?"

"I want you to pole yourself, James and William across immediately. Run to Mr. Hollister's house as soon as you land and ask the lady there to telephone for the doctor and prepare a bed for an injured man. Then you and William must dry yourselves as much as possible near the kitchen stove until I get there, that is if the lady is willing. Now, William, will you promise me to obey Ted and not go leaping into the lake in such a foolhardy way again?"

"Oh, yes," assented Willie, who was sitting on top of his blanket by this time. "I'd like to help pole that raft, though."

"Don't you dare to attempt such a thing," commanded his guardian. "James, you will pay strict attention to Ted as superior officer, I am sure."

"Yes, sir."

"Now that is settled nicely," said Mr. Stanley, drawing a long breath, but he was soon to discover his mistake and Eben was forced to admit the following day that "those pesky boys" had not been a hindrance after all. For when Mr. Stanley and Mr. Hollister attempted to move the crippled aviator, they found that their combined strength and skill would be needed every moment to make the rowboat at all possible as a means of

transportation. Another pair of arms at the oars became absolutely necessary. Ted was hailed and the raft returned quickly to the island.

"I don't like to leave the two little fellows here alone," objected Mr. Stanley.

"It can't be helped, sir," stubbornly declared Eben. "Ted will row back for them as soon as he can."

"Don't—leave—children—here. Take—them—first," the injured man murmured feverishly.

"Don't you fret a mite, Mister. We'll manage all right," cheered Eben, bending over him.

Willie-Frank, standing close by, bounded forward and patting the stranger's cheek with his small hand, said soothingly in the quaint way he had at times:

"We aren't afraid, sir. We can play we are shipwrecked. It will be fun."

If the truth had been entirely known Master William was ready to dance for joy at the thought of remaining on what he termed a "desert island" after dark, with only Jimmie for company. The spirit of adventure thrilled him with delight.

His new friend opened his merry eyes once more and another smile flickered over his face. "Little—First—Aider!" was all he said.

Mr. Stanley felt very uneasy about leaving his two small charges by themselves on the lonely shore, but as there was nothing else to be done he gave them some parting instructions and the boat soon glided on its way.

Willie and Jimmie, by common impulse, rushed off to examine the airship.

"Let's get the lantern. It's in the cave," advised Jimmie, turning back.

"Don't go into the bushes, boys," called back Mr. Stanley, sternly.

"We can explore the cave, anyway," suggested Willie brightly. "Why do they call it Hermit's Cave, Jim?"

"Folks say an old man used to live there all by himself. They named it Hermit's Cave after he died. They've got some of his old books up at the Historical Society on Main Street."

"Whee! That's better than any story in a book," said Willie enthusiastically.

"Look, this was the bench he used to sit on," explained Jimmie, acting as guide.

With the aid of the lantern which they had unhooked from the wooden bracket on the wall, the boys had penetrated to the most extreme corner of the hut. A long, low stone slab placed upon four immense tree stumps formed the ancient seat. The trees had evidently been cut down by this sturdy old hermit and the cave afterwards built around them as a center. The floor was damp and chill to the feet, but Willie-Frank did not know it. He was too much excited to consider such trifles.

"Jimmie, do you suppose there's a treasure hidden in here?" he demanded, his eyes shining.

"We often dig for one," explained Jimmie, "when we come over on picnics, but we didn't

find it yet. See, there's the last hole Bob Evans made."

Willie examined the scene of Bob's attempt but was forced to admit that the results looked unprofitable. "I'd like to try some day. Will you dig with me, Jimmie?"

"Course, when we get back from the city, I'd like to. Wish we could go up near the airship, don't you?"

"Yes. It may be gone when we get back from Boston."

"I guess not. Eben said that man would be laid up for ever so long. Wouldn't you like to see him fly it when he's all better?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Jimmie.

"Perhaps we will. He's a nice man," complimented Willie. "He likes to joke, I think. Wasn't he brave?"

"Do you see anything over in that corner?" asked Jimmie, seizing Willie by the arm.

Willie looked in the direction to which Jimmie pointed, and sure enough, he did see a small, round, dark object and two sparkling eyes. Hand in hand, the boys cautiously approached it. Jimmie had picked up a stone from the floor and Willie swung the lantern excitedly. Then both burst out laughing. The something was the "airman's" leather cap and the moonbeams shining through a square hole in the roof of the cave had given the glass, which acts as a protection to an aviator's eyes, the appearance which had so startled Jimmie.

Willie dropped the lantern and picked up the helmet. Jimmie stubbed his toe against what he supposed was a branch of some kind. He glanced down.

"Willie, see!" he cried jubilantly. "It's the treasure."

A slim, black envelope wallet lay open on the damp ground. On one side was pasted the picture of a laughing little girl, the opposite holder contained a package of bills.

"It's that man's," exclaimed Willie. "He must have dropped it."

"Oo-ooho-ho-Curly? Jim? Where are you?" called Ted from the boat. He had returned.

"Come in! Come in!" shouted the boys. "We have something to show you."

Ted was properly impressed with both the cap and the wallet, but hurried his chums to the boat.

"We mustn't stay here all night, fellows," he cautioned. "They might need us over to Eben's. Get in, quick!"

"Did Hetty telephone for my father?" asked Jimmie.

"Guess so. I ran up and told her to. The 'Flier' moaned a lot when they lifted him up the banking on the other side. He's badly hurt, I think."

"Isn't it a beauty?" cried Willie, nodding towards the aeroplane as the boys stooped to extinguish the beacon-fire and gather up their belongings.

"Tip-top," assented Ted. "Sorry it threw him,

though. But of course it was that tree hurt him most. Here, Curly, take this pole, and, Jim, hold the rope of the raft. We might as well pull it across with us. One-two-three—we're off."

So unwillingly leaving the island and its rival curiosities—the ancient cave and the modern airship—the boys pushed off for Mr. Hollister's pier.

CHAPTER IX

UNCLE GERALD

DR. CLEARY found it advisable to remove the injured man immediately to Kanton Hospital, hence it was very late before Mr. Stanley returned to the farm for his two charges. What was his surprise to find that Hetty had put the youngsters to bed after warm baths and a cozy feast of hot cocoa and bread and butter.

The spare room, the pride of good Hetty's life, had been prepared for Mr. Stanley, and so sincere was the hospitality of these good souls, the Hollisters, that Willie's guardian accepted the favor with the fine simplicity it merited.

"But we must make an early start to-morrow morning," he announced after telephoning to Boston. "Mr. Thorne is impatient to see his little nephew."

When the time for farewells arrived the following morning, after a lively meal in Hetty's cheerful kitchen, Ted begged the others to send him a post card of Bunker Hill Monument and then he trotted off for home, with Mr. Stanley's good-by warming his rather lonely young heart.

Hetty seemed loth to let Curly go. She had taken quite a fancy to the little rogue.

"Wish I could present him to you with my compliments. I don't see anything attractive about that fuzzy little article myself," growled Mr. Stanley, but there was a twinkle in his eye which prevented the words from wounding one's feelings. Indeed, Curly pattered over to him at this moment, and standing on his wee hind-legs begged engagingly. His pink tongue lolled out, his dark eyes sparkled beneath his woolly mop and he certainly was irresistible.

"Whoop!" Willie said, making a dash at his pet and cuddling him up against his neck. "I'd love to give him to you, Miss Hetty, but I couldn't part with Curly—really, I couldn't. We will come to see you often when we get home though—won't we, Curly? Speak up, sir!"

Curly spoke sharply and convincingly in his own particular fashion.

Warm-hearted Hetty hugged both dog and master and called them "precious chicks." She also kissed Jimmie, who gave her a satisfying hug in return. He was an affectionate child and long ago Hetty had proved herself his loyal friend. He loved her devotedly.

Willie-Frank was struggling desperately with his dust coat.

"Can't put it on with the sleeves wrong-side out, young man," remarked Mr. Stanley, relieving the boy of the soft gray garment, twitching the sleeves into place and holding it accommodatingly for its owner.

"How is the Flier?" Jimmie suddenly asked.

"The flier," repeated Mr. Stanley in a puzzled tone. "Oh, you mean the poor aviator. He will get along nicely, Dr. Cleary and the other surgeons have decided. It will be a long siege for him, though. By the way, he sent a kind message to each of you boys, and also to Ted. He appreciated greatly the kindness all showed him. The contents of the wallet, he wished quite rashly to divide among you, but, of course, I refused to accept it. He was happy to see the wallet because it contained the picture of his little daughter of whom he is very fond."

"Why, it was Dolly Lambert's picture," blurted out Jimmie. "Is he Dolly's father?"

"Who is Dolly?" demanded Willie.

"Ah, then you know the little girl, James?" remarked Mr. Stanley. "She lives here in Stedley, Mr. Lambert said. Dr. Cleary is taking a message to her from him."

"Yes, Dolly goes to school with me," said Jimmie. "She's the nicest girl in my room. All the boys and girls like her. She never tells tales and she is full of fun."

"Every one likes Dolly Lambert," commented Miss Hetty decidedly. "She's a bit of a tomboy, I reckon, and some of the ladies in town shake their heads over her pranks, but she's got a heart, that child has, big enough to hug the world. I love Dolly. Wish her father had let her come to me to board, but, of course, this is a good way from her school. So that was Tommie Lambert, was it? Dear, dear me. That's what comes of

all these new notions,—cars without horses and ships sailing in the air. Nonsense—I say—all of 'em, every one,'' and Hetty pounded her foot down on the step so fiercely that Curly jumped.

''An automobile isn't nonsense, is it, Hetty?'' asked Jimmie. ''I just love to ride in one, don't you, Will?''

''Um-m-m,'' assented Willie, who was now at the wheel of the car, striving to put Mr. Jake's lessons into practice.

''Let me try, too, will you?'' said Jimmie, rushing over and leaping upon the step.

''Careful, boys,'' advised Mr. Stanley. ''Suppose you will take Miss Hetty for a spin in your own car when you learn to run it?'' he teased Willie, lifting him out by the collar and dropping him lightly into the tonneau. He subjected Jimmie to the same treatment, and both boys laughed. It was all in play, and Mr. Stanley's fingers were gentle as well as strong.

''Yes, yes, I will,'' cried Willie-Frank. ''You'll come, won't you, Miss Hetty? My car is shiny and brown like molasses candy.''

''Mercy me—I'll have a better time than Cinderella in her pumpkin coach, seems to me,'' laughed that kind lady as she advanced with Curly in her arms. ''Good-by, you sweet little doggie,'' she said, hugging the furry ball and handing him to Jimmie, not before Curly covered her face with kisses, however. The motor horn honked—hens cackled and flew to right and left —Shep, the fine old collie, came tearing out of the

barn to bark—Myra the cook stood on the porch and waved her apron, Eben cheered, and amid much laughter and friendly good-bys the motorists started once more on their way, and the last they saw of Lake Drive farm as they whirled off was Hetty shaking her hand at them from the gate.

Both boys knelt upon the seat to wave their caps to her. Curly bounced out on the folded hood of the machine and yapped, yapped. Next came the splendid sensation of skimming through the sunny morning air along the smooth state road.

Late that afternoon the big black car rolled merrily into "Boston Town."

"The Boston Opera House, Symphony Hall, Horticultural Hall, Mechanic's Building, the Boston Public Library," chanted Mr. Stanley. He was tossing bits of information over his shoulder to his young companions as he steered the car past these various buildings on his way down a broad and busy avenue. Not being able to see the boyish faces he could not observe the disappointment deepening there, nor was he aware that his efforts of amusement had failed until amid the bustle of Copley Square, Willie asked in mournful tones:

"Aren't we going to see the Swan Boats pretty soon, and where is Bunker Hill?"

"And the Stadium and the State House and the Common?" chimed in Jimmie.

There was no chance for their kind guardian

to reply, for the automobile had stopped before the entrance of a large hotel. Already a pompous looking person in hotel livery was unclasping the catch of the tonneau door.

Since entering Boston the children had enjoyed a wonderful surprise which even the absence of the Swan Boats could not entirely dispel. This was the military appearance of the old historic city on this May day, 1917.

Flags floated over public buildings, flags rippled from hundreds of windows and doorways along the busy thoroughfare, flags adorned the coat lapels of men and flashed triumphantly amid the daintiness of women's frocks. Flags were borne in the hands of little children and waved by sturdy boys.

But this was not all. Soldierly figures in fascinating khaki moved here and there, amid the passers-by. The jolly blue of the middy's uniform was also a familiar sight. Posters of Uncle Sam with commanding finger pointing, and the forcible words, "I Want You," printed beneath, the Red Cross symbol, the Boy Scout uniform, recruiting stations and countless other evidences of preparedness were broadcast.

There had been very little public demonstration thus far in Stedley. The proclamation of our President, the state of war into which our beloved country was plunged had stirred that small town to its very depths, of course, but for the most part Stedleyites were quiet, simple folks. Their ways were quiet, too. Courage and good citizenship

were both implanted in their honest hearts and when the time for active service came, Stedley's men would rise to the occasion proudly. Meanwhile, they went about "doing their bit" at home with their usual calmness.

But in Boston! Ah, things were gloriously different here. True to her old traditions, the "Hotbed of the Revolution" was once more ready and eager for a speedy call to arms. The soldier spirit of a gallant grandfather and daddy stirred in Willie Thorne's veins as he saw this wealth of patriotic enthusiasm on every side.

Leaving the automobile, our party entered the hotel. Mr. Stanley pleasantly instructed the boys to wait for him, while he crossed to the main desk to give some necessary information and instructions. With heads uncovered the two little lads stood gazing reverentially at the great flag stretched across the wall directly in front of the door. The eyes of both were shining with all the love of Young America for that Starry Banner. Jimmie's cheeks were flushed, his honest face aglow with pleasure. He, too, was the descendant of soldiers, and Dr. Cleary had been among the first of the Bay State physicians to offer his professional skill to the great cause.

Curly, on his best behavior, had stationed himself close to his master's side. Many guests, as they hurried in and out, as well as those strolling about at leisure, smiled kindly at the children. They made a pretty picture as they thus silently saluted the Stars and Stripes. Curly, with his

pert little head erect and bright eyes gleaming beneath the soft, white tangle of his hair, added to the quaintness of the tableau.

But just at this moment an unexpected happening took place.

Something clattered to the floor at Willie's feet, and a testy voice exclaimed:

"Pick it up, child. Be quick! Are manners taught at all in the schools or homes these days I'd like to know! Gray hairs seem to merit no respect from the rising generation!"

Stooping, the little boy raised the heavy walking stick and viewed its owner with wide-eyed surprise. A cross old gentleman, in alighting from one of the elevators, had accidentally dropped his cane right at the feet of our three friends. He was limping painfully as he advanced to receive it from Willie's hand.

Recovering from his amazement at the severity and suddenness of the stranger's reproof, the child bounded forward.

"Here it is, sir," he said gently, but the impatient old gentleman had caught sight of Mr. Stanley.

"Why, Stan, it's good to see you back. Took you long enough, though," he ended his greeting in a growling tone.

"Good afternoon," Mr. Stanley remarked cordially. "We were delayed, as you know. How is the foot?"

"Bad! Stan—very bad. Haven't known an easy moment since you left. So these are the

children—well—well—tut-tut. Which is Willie? Not the plain one with the bushy head of curls, I hope." He glanced at our hero, who seemed to find something fascinating in the fierce old face.

"Come, now, that's too severe a criticism altogether," remonstrated Mr. Stanley. "William is a fine little fellow, curls or no curls, and this is James. He, too, is a perfect gentleman."

But Jimmie edged away and Curly followed his example. Neither of them approved of this irritable stranger.

"Let me assist you," said Mr. Stanley politely. "I presume you will want to return to the suite with us."

"Yes—yes—might as well. Wasted all morning watching for you. Dull when you're away, Stanley. No one to talk to. No one to fight with."

"Well, I like that!" began Willie's and Jimmie's kind protector. "Come, boys!"

There was little time in the elevator for conversation, but Jimmie's bitter disappointment and Willie's amazement were somewhat lessened by their interest in the working of the car and their delight in the sensation of speeding upward and feeling the swift rush of air.

"Straight down the corridor, boys," directed Mr. Stanley, as they alighted on the seventh floor. He was giving his arm and kind attention to his companion, who grumbled:

"Don't push into my room, the door is open. I won't have that miserable dog cluttering up my

belongings. Keep right on until you come to your own room, children."

Glad to escape from that irritable voice the lads hurried along the hall as fast as possible.

"Will, did you think your uncle was so old and —and so cross?" Jimmie looked at his friend anxiously. He didn't mean to be rude, but he was so upset that he blurted out his dismay at the very first opportunity.

Willie stopped short and looked hard at Jimmie, and then laughed. "Say, Jimmie Cleary, do you think that old gentleman is my uncle?"

"Of course," said Jimmie. "Don't you?"

"No, siree-ee," declared Willie, decidedly.

"Well, where is he then?" asked Jimmie.

"I don't know, but somehow I'm sure—ever so sure, that he isn't my Uncle Gerald. Why, Uncle Gerald must be a little like Daddy. You know that man isn't one bit. Besides, Uncle Gerald laughs a lot. Mr. Stanley told me so."

"Curly, Curly, come here! Oh, Will, he's gone to his room after all! Call him back quick!" Jimmie moaned in distressed accents.

Yes—there was Master Curly coolly sniffing at the threshold. Now he had pushed his tiny head inside the half-open door and before Willie could cry had disappeared from view.

"Get that dog! Go after him, do you hear—call him—punish him—take him out of my room. I won't have him in there, I say. Run, William!" All this from the peevish old gentleman.

Like a flash Willie pursued his pet, but when he

crossed the threshold it was only to see Curly wriggling his way through another door. He departed yelping joyfully. Willie paused. A sound had reached his ears which made him forget the cross stranger and disobedient Curly.

Some one was playing, and oh, how splendidly he was doing it, too. And the air! Ah, that was what sent Willie speeding after Curly, for the tune was "Marching Through Georgia." There was a crash as of startled hands falling abruptly on the keys, an exclamation, and then a ringing, merry, delightful laugh.

"Whose little dog are you?" a deep, pleasant voice boomed merrily.

"Mine, if you please," answered Willie promptly. "He ran away. I tried to stop him. He didn't mean any harm. He loves music; I guess that's why, sir."

In a distant corner of this interesting looking room was a piano. At it sat a big, broad-shouldered man, with thick, wavy gray hair. He whirled on the stool and faced Willie-Frank.

Our hero gasped. The man's face was burned to a crisp, deep brown from the sun, and out of the dark setting laughed a pair of kind gray eyes and flashed a set of strong, white teeth. He wore a dark green bath-robe on which jolly dragons danced and capered. There was a crutch resting against the piano.

"Oh!" cried Willie-Frank, his small voice trembling with eagerness.

"Ah!" said the big man, whose voice softened tenderly.

Two green arms covered with yellow dragons were outstretched lovingly and Willie-Frank rushed headlong across the room and tumbled into them.

"Uncle Gerald!" he screamed joyfully. "I knew—I just knew you'd look like Daddy. I'm so glad."

"So am I, Bill," laughed the deep rich voice. "More glad than you can guess, my little man!"

CHAPTER X

SWAN BOATS

A LITTLE girl with fiery red hair hanging in two long pig-tails down her back, walked up and down in front of the refreshment cart which stood near the Charles Street entrance of Boston Common.

"Don't the pop-corn balls look nice, Jessie? Don't they, Johnnie?" she remarked to the small, sunny girl and sulky boy who tagged at her heels.

"Um-hm, um-hm," Jessie agreed, skipping merrily.

"Don't want pop-corn balls," bellowed scowling Johnnie. "Want a cone. Get me a cone."

The kind face of the little red-haired girl clouded, but her voice was very tender and persuasive as she bent over him:

"We could get five of the big puffy balls, Johnnie dear, for our nickel, but if I buy a cone there wouldn't be only a taste of ice-cream for each of us. Only one cone for five cents, you know," and she looked down at the precious nickel lying in her hot little hand.

"I want a cone. Sha'n't eat old pop-corn balls," yelled the disagreeable child, kicking up a big cloud of dust, as though to show his sister that he was not to be trifled with.

"O dear!" she said, with a tiny catch in her voice; "I 'spose we have to get what you want, Johnnie, or you'll be cross all day and spoil our fun. But mind!" she added sternly, "if I do buy a cone you must share it up with Jessie. You can't have a whole five cents' worth for yourself."

With that Johnnie emitted a terrible howl of protest and was about to throw himself down on the ground and kick, an action which always brought this indulgent little sister to terms when something happened.

A sturdy grip was on Johnnie's collar, a small but strong hand was clapped over Johnnie's wide-open mouth, a dependable looking boy of about eight years of age faced the little girl with his honest blue eyes flashing:

"Go ahead and buy what you want. Don't mind him. I'll keep him quiet."

Johnnie was too much surprised to finish out the yell he had begun even had he been able to do so. He squirmed around and tried to look at his captor.

The motherly little girl with red hair flew protectingly to the rescue.

"Let go—let go," she cried. "He didn't do anything to you. Don't you dare to hurt him." She tugged fiercely at the strange boy's serge sleeve. He held fast to Johnnie, however, but regarded his sister with kindness in his gaze, remarking dryly, "I'm not hurting him. I can't; he's under my size. I'm only just managing him, that's all."

Jimmie Cleary, for it was he, stumbled somewhat over the word "managing," but it had recurred to his memory as splendidly appropriate.

The man who was selling fruit to a small, old-fashioned lady in a rusty black silk dress, laughed at Jimmie's reassuring reply as though it gave him much amusement.

In due time Johnnie was released, and in spite of Lizzie's fear that he might "take on worse than ever" he sprang away from Jimmie with a cheerful grin of admiration.

"Are you going to ride on the Swan Boats?" asked Jimmie pleasantly, addressing all three. He had his hands in his pockets now. "I am," he announced joyously.

"Oh, isn't that lovely!" exclaimed Lizzie, her face shining. "Do you hear him, Johnnie dear?"

"Huh—huh," nodded Johnnie, edging over nearer and nearer to his gentle sister.

Jessie hopped up and down in front of Jimmie and asked, "If we sit on a bench near the shore will you wave to us? We're going to feed the swans, but, oh, I wish we could sail on their backs like you're going to do. See, we brought lunch with us."

She was a lively little creature and in a moment had lifted the cover of the Uneeda cracker box which she carried. Within Jimmie saw a few pieces of dry bread and some small bits of cheese. He was too manly to mention the fact that he thought such fare far from tempting. He smiled brightly and assured Jessie that he would be sure

to wave, and then the procession started off for the gardens; Johnnie running ahead and glancing back now and then as though to be sure that the older boy was following; Jessie dancing after him, her tiny feet no less active because encased in broken shoes, and last of all, patient Lizzie carefully guarding the precious pop-corn balls.

"I'm so glad," she thought, "that I was able to buy them instead of a cone. They seem like lots and we won't be so hungry."

"Don't you like cones?" shouted Jimmie from the distance. She turned and smiled back at him wistfully.

"Oh, yes, ever so much; but all we had to spend was five cents, you see," she answered.

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmie. Then he grinned cheerfully. "I know how it is," he assured her. "I've often had the crowd of fellows, twenty maybe, all telling me how to spend a dime. I've got lots of money to-day, though. See!" He held up a crisp piece of green paper. It was a dollar bill.

Lizzie's eyes grew large with surprise. "My!" was all she could say at first. "Oh, dear, there's Johnnie bumping into some one. Good-by," she cried hastily, as the sound of a scolding voice from the sidewalk fell upon her ear.

"Bye," said Jimmie, and strolled back to the cart. When he reached the entrance to the gardens some five minutes later it was to find an irate old gentleman awaiting him, hobbling up and down, thumping his stout cane on the pavement.

"Where have you been, boy?" he thundered. "I'll not play nursemaid another day, mark my words! Jerry Thorne is going crazy. Piling young desperadoes from his one-horse town on his shoulders and on mine, too, and on poor Stanley's." More thumps of the cane and then, "Well, are you ready for those pesky sailing toys now?"

One day in this quarrelsome gentleman's company had changed Jimmie's first opinion greatly. Wasn't he kind Mr. Stanley's oldest friend? In fact when Mr. Stanley was a little boy like Jimmie he had been very poor and this person, whose generous heart was often hidden behind a blustering temper, had adopted him and educated him. Of course now that Mr. Stanley was prosperous himself, it was a happy pleasure for him to share his good fortune with his former protector.

Willie and Jimmie could quite understand that, being warm-hearted, loving little chaps themselves. Besides, Mr. Trent, that was the old gentleman's name, had proved himself a delightful story teller. He had also planned numerous surprises for the two little boys with as keen a pleasure as even Uncle Gerald and Mr. Stanley displayed. True he fretted and he scolded and he fumed and he found fault with them constantly, also with Curly, but he always ended up by contradicting his surly words with kindly actions.

Jimmie liked him very much now and was not one mite afraid of him.

"Which color do you like best, Mr. Trent, white or pink or chocolate?" demanded the boy ex-

ultantly. Both brown hands were full of ice-cream cones, six in all.

Mr. Trent gasped. "Have you bought out the ice-cream cart with my money?" he roared; but Jimmie smiled up at him roguishly.

"You told me to spend it just as I wanted to," he said gayly. "So I did. Have the pink one; strawberry flavor is ripping, you know. I'll have a pink one, too. And Will likes chocolate, so here's his. Hold them, will you, just a second, please," and Jimmie dashed off, leaving his astonished guardian juggling three overflowing cones with one hand and grasping his cane with the other.

"Nonsense—arrant nonsense. I won't stand for it. I'll tell Jerry so as soon as I get back to the hotel. At my time of life, too!" he sputtered. But he took good care of Jimmie's cones all the same, and he walked slowly into the gardens after the flying boy.

"Hi, there, wait a minute, please," caroled a friendly voice.

Lizzie, guiding her two charges toward an empty bench near the pond, stopped and looked over her shoulder. Johnnie looked, too, and then took to his heels in terror. He thought Jimmie was after him again because he had just pushed Jessie rudely. Jessie looked and with a gladsome little cry tripped back to meet the approaching child.

"What color do you like best?" asked Jimmie. "White or chocolate or pink?"

"White—white," gurgled Jessie, clapping her hands.

Jimmie extended the vanilla ice-cream cone.

"Oh, Lizzie, he's giving me a cone, see, oh, see!" cried the happy child.

"What color do you like?" continued Jimmie, addressing Lizzie.

"Do you mean for me to choose a cone for myself?" gasped Lizzie, her patient, tired face aglow with surprise and delight.

"Yes, and I hope you like brown, because this chocolate one is jolly full. The man heaped it up good and high."

"I love chocolate!" whispered Lizzie hoarsely. "Oh, is it truly mine?"

"Surest thing you know," laughed the lad. "Now, Johnnie, here's a pink one for you. It's a beauty; but you've got to promise something or I won't give it to you."

Johnnie had peeped out from behind a tree, and when he saw how interesting Jimmie and his gifts looked he had come slowly back to Lizzie's side.

"What'll I promise?" he asked eagerly.

"Not to be so mean and piggy ever, ever again. Why, in Stedley, we duck a fellow in the lake if he's greedy and—well, a bully—that's what you were, Johnnie."

Johnnie's knuckles sought his eyes—Johnnie wailed, and Jimmie's tender heart relented.

"There, there," he said in exact imitation of his father's manner toward himself after a reprimand. "Perk up—you'll never be so mean again,

I know. Here, try your cone, it's jolly. I'm going back for mine." He started off at a trot, leaving three ecstatic little mortals lapping, eating and sucking their delicious treat.

"Do you imagine for an instant, my fine fellow," demanded Mr. Trent, "that I intend to be made a show of in this fashion every hour of the day?"

"Eat it, Mr. Trent. Hurrah! Mine's fine. I'll hold Will's. I hope it won't melt before he comes. Let's sit here until we finish them. Will you?"

Grumblingly Mr. Trent, led on by Jimmie's enthusiasm, permitted himself to be coaxed first into sitting down on a very conspicuous bench and then into tasting the ice-cream. At the shrieking sound of a familiar motor-horn he started guiltily and looked toward the street.

Mr. Stanley from the wheel was laughing at the old gentleman mischievously. A small boy bounded out of the machine and rushed in through the gate and over to Jimmie's side.

"Goody!" he cried. "Did you buy some for us, too, Jim?"

But both Jimmie and Mr. Trent were staring at the child as though he were a stranger.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he laughed, tossing up his straw hat and then catching it carefully, suddenly remembering how new and fine it was. "Don't you know me? I'm Will Thorne, of course. Don't I look great though?"

Jimmie stared and stared and the melting ice-cream from Willie's long suffering cone dropped

down in a little chocolate stream on to Jimmie's suit, but he never noticed it.

Mr. Trent rose stiffly, tossed his half eaten dainty into a nearby receptacle for rubbish and muttered gruffly:

"Stan and I can go now for a quiet spin. Don't fall into that pond and be sure you meet us at the Arlington Street gate at three. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, we will," agreed Willie.

Suddenly Jimmie "came to," as he expressed it. "Mr. Trent," he shouted after that retreating figure, "I forgot poor Mr. Stanley. I didn't get him a cone at all."

"Well, he won't lose much," growled the old gentleman and then he marched stiffly out the gate and across the street. Mr. Stanley soon helped him into the machine and they motored off in the direction of Beacon Street.

"Where are your curls?" demanded Jimmie.

"All gone," laughed Willie, who was now making quick work of his cone. "Catch on to the pockets, Jim. Aren't they fine? I guess I have more than you by a lot."

Jimmie walked around and around his friend. Bereft of girlish curls, his bright head held very high, Willie-Frank stood glorying in all the dignity of his first step toward manhood. A real boy suit now replaced his more childish Russian blouses. He had placed his new hat on the bench.

"You certainly are great," praised Jimmie after he had taken Willie's altered appearance in from all viewpoints. "Count your pockets."

Such excitement as followed! Jimmie pulled out all his pockets, placing the treasures contained in them in an orderly pile on the bench. Willie followed his example. His suit was so new that only one pocket was in use so far. In pulling this out for inspection, jingling coins tumbled out and scattered in all directions. Both boys pursued them and soon were kneeling down in front of the bench counting Willie's small hoard to see that no frisky penny, nickel or dime had escaped them.

"We have heaps of money, haven't we?" remarked Jimmie.

"Ninety-five cents," Willie-Frank stated joyfully. "I spent five getting weighed."

"I have seventy cents," explained Jimmie. "I spent thirty for the cones."

Willie sat back on his heels. "My, you must have bought a lot, Jim," he remarked.

"Six," answered Jimmie promptly. "I gave three away to Lizzie and Jessie and Johnnie."

"Who are Lizzie and Jessie and Johnnie?" queried his chum with eager interest.

Jimmie entertained him with a funny account of his adventure in the Common. Willie laughed heartily. "Perhaps we'll meet them on the Swan Boats," he said. "I'd like to see them first rate."

"That's just it," the other lad replied. "They can't ride on the Swan Boats. They haven't any money, you know; all they had was that nickel. I was wondering if we could give them some of ours."

"Sure—sure! Oh, that's fine. Come on, let's

find them and do it now. They can sit with us and we'll have a jolly time. Perhaps we could get the front seat like we did yesterday. Come on!" He gathered his wealth up and thrust it back into his pocket, seized Jimmie's hand and was scampering off, when his comrade reminded him of his new hat which was still lying on the bench. Tossing it on his shorn head, Willie eagerly set off again, Jimmie at his side.

"Want to ride with us on the Swan Boat?" Jimmie asked. He and Willie had crept softly up behind the seat near the pond on which the three children sat. They were feeding a stately swan and enjoying their lunch and corn-balls. Lizzie jumped.

"This is Will Thorne, my chum," said Jimmie. "We want you to sail on the pond with us. Will you?"

"Will we?" asked Lizzie with a long-drawn-out shriek of joy, "say—just ask us—that's all," and her sad young face lost all its care-worn expression and assumed a droll, merry look of absolute delight.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN IN THE CHECKED SUIT

"WE are asking you," laughed Willie-Frank. "Come on! Are you Johnnie?" he demanded, clutching the little boy's hand.

"Yes."

"Well, we can run over and get the tickets. Let's hurry. We want to ride on the first boat."

Such a happy party! They succeeded in securing the very front bench.

How charming its brilliant red paint seemed to Lizzie, how nice the man was who sailed their pretty craft. Jimmie called him Captain and he seemed well acquainted with both lads.

"We rode around five times yesterday," announced Willie-Frank to Jessie. "When my uncle gets well he says he will take us out in a real boat. I want to learn to row, but I think this is lots of fun."

"So do I," chirped happy little Jessie.

Just at this point Willie nearly lost his hat and he hopped about in such a funny way trying to save it from a watery dip that all the children laughed gleefully.

"Will had curls just like Jessie's yesterday," teased Jimmie, "but he went and had them cut off this morning and now his hat never stays on."

"Jimmie didn't know me when he saw me after they were cut off," retorted Willie.

"Were they just like mine?" questioned little Jessie curiously.

"Almost," answered Willie, but he hastened to add, "I didn't like them because I'm a boy. I didn't want to look like a girl, of course. When Uncle Gerald told Jim and me we could have a wish and it would be granted, I wished to have those curls cut off and he laughed and said they could be clipped as soon as I liked. I went to the barber-shop with Mr. Stanley this morning and the barber cut them off quick as a wink and he put some perfume on my head. Can you smell it?"

"I can," piped up Johnnie. "It's fine."

"Then Mr. Stanley took me down to a big store and told the man to show us some real suits of clothes. This is one of them. It's splendid. It has lots of pockets. Say, what did you wish for, Jimmie?"

"A post-card of Bunker Hill for Ted. Mr. Thorne bought me a whole package and I sent lots of them away. I slipped them down the mail chute. It was sport."

"Bunker Hill, all of them?" asked Lizzie, much interested.

"Oh, no, lots of places. There was one of the State House."

"Whom did you mail that card to, Jim?" asked Willie eagerly.

"To Mamma. I sent her four and Papa two and Ellie one and Ted two, and I sent a picture

of these Swan Boats to Mr. Lambert, the aviator. Mr. Thorne wrote some of them for me because my hand got tired."

"Look at the island!" shouted Johnnie.

The Swan Boat was gracefully gliding past the shore of the pretty miniature island situated in the center of the pond. This reminded Jimmie and Willie of their moonlight adventure on another island a few nights previous. In chorus they told the story to open-mouthed Johnnie, eager-eyed Jessie and admiring Lizzie. A young man who sat on the bench behind them seemed to find this story very interesting. He followed the children as they rose to leave the Swan Boats at the completion of their trip.

"Lizzie, let's give 'em the two pop-corn balls that are left," whispered affectionate Jessie, cuddling up closer to her sister. She put her small palm up over her mouth and thought only Lizzie could hear her, but Johnnie heard, too, and startled both his sisters by his unexpected generosity.

"Sure, give 'em to 'em now," he agreed, bobbing his head encouragingly.

Lizzie bent over and handed the pink ball to Willie and the white one to Jimmie. Both boys were delighted.

"Thanks ever so much," said Willie. "You haven't any though for yourself. Here. Here, everybody take a bite out of mine."

"And mine, too," cried Jimmie eagerly. Even the Swan Boat man must have his share, the chil-

dren all declared, but he refused pleasantly. Some older people were boarding the Swan Boats now, and many children. Every one watched our jolly little party of five with considerable interest. The young man who had left the boat when they did lingered close to them on the landing.

"Wish we had the bundle Eugene gave me," confided Willie to Jimmie.

"Oh, cheers! I have it," exclaimed Jimmie joyously. "I took it with me this morning when I started out. Thought we might want it." And lo! Jimmie plunged his hand inside his blouse and drew forth a brown paper parcel which had been reduced to a somewhat squashy condition.

"Hurrah!" shouted impetuous Willie, jumping up and swaying to and fro with delight. "It's something Mammy Dorcas made," he explained to his three new friends. "We were to eat it at a hungry place on the road, but we haven't had one tiny chance to use it before. There was always something else. Open it quick, Jim! Quick!"

Seated on the grass and not far from the water's edge, bumping heads together and laughing merrily, our young friends explored the contents of the mysterious package.

"Ginger-bread men, oh, my!" shouted Willie.

"See the pretty buttons," sang Jessie.

Yes, ginger-bread men they were. "Jolly ones," according to Jimmie's version. They had currant eyes and red candied caraway seeds for mouths, and as Jessie had remarked, gorgeous

buttons down the front of their ginger-bread coats. These were pink and green candied caraway seeds.

Such fun, such feasting! Such laughter as followed this discovery. Perhaps you imagine that these famous ginger-bread men were stale. I can only vouch for their state of perfection by quoting what Johnnie said in the exuberance of his first nibble:

"This is the goodest cake I ever did taste."

"I don't want to eat my dolly. I want to take it home to play with," gurgled happy Jessie.

"Oh, eat it," urged practical Jimmie, "that's what Mammy Dorcas made it for."

"What will we do next?" asked Willie when the excitement over the ginger-bread men had somewhat subsided.

"I wish we could ride in one of those real boats," announced Jimmie, gazing longingly at a rowboat marked "Water Sprite," in which two older lads were enjoying themselves midway in the pond.

"Suppose you come with me," said a strange voice pleasantly. "I'll give you all a little trip around the pond and let you help me with one oar."

In great surprise the children all looked up to see the young man who had been sitting behind them on the Swan Boat, leaning lazily against a nearby tree, his hat in his hand, a smile on his lips. "Wouldn't you like to sail with me?" he asked in the same friendly tone, as none of the

little ones answered his first question, so great was their amazement.

"Yes, sir, we would, thank you," smiled Willie-Frank. "But, but maybe we would be too much trouble," he added, making a brave attempt at politeness although eagerness shone in his eyes.

"No trouble at all, bless your hearts. Come along," the friendly stranger replied cordially, and soon he was hiring one of the fascinating row-boats and helping Jessie and Lizzie in. Willie-Frank, Johnnie and Jimmie made quick work of their own entrances into the boat. Willie landed with his usual bounce of joy and set the little craft into agitated motion. The man laughed as he took up the oars and pulled away from the landing. He was a jolly person with a droll freckled face. He had light hair, light blue eyes and a funny smile. He wore a black and white checked suit.

From the moment they were all seated in the craft he seemed to forget the rest of the party and talked only to Willie-Frank. Although the lively little fellow turned often to the rest, asking them questions and trying to give them a chance to talk, too, their strange host paid no attention whatever to any remarks made by Jimmie or the others. He insisted on showing Willie how to use the one oar with him, he praised the child, he questioned him with great interest concerning the aviator of whom he said he had overheard them talking on the Swan Boat.

"Your Uncle is Mr. Thorne, isn't he?" he said suddenly.

"Oh, yes," nodded Willie. "Do you know Uncle Gerald?"

"Yes, but I have only a slight personal acquaintance with him; it is chiefly by the fame of some of his inventions that I know him best," the man replied. "I suppose he has a wonderful workshop down there at his big estate in the country—Stedley, isn't that the name of the place?"

Willie was too busy with his struggles at the oar to answer this question and so no more was said about Mr. Thorne for awhile. Jimmie was more than usually quiet as he sat trailing his hands in the water over the side of the boat. Suddenly he pulled out his small silver watch of which he was very proud. His family had given it to him on his eighth birthday and Jimmie knew well how much love and sacrifice had gone into that little watch, for the Clearys were not wealthy people, they were too generous to others in need to ever have very much for themselves.

"Hi, Will, it's nearly time to meet Mr. Trent and Mr. Stanley. I guess we will have to get back to the shore."

"Oh, is it? I nearly forgot," exclaimed Willie.

"Going to meet some one?" queried the man.

"Yes, sir. We promised to be at the Arlington Street gate at three o'clock. We are going in the auto to see Bunker Hill and some other nice places with Mr. Stanley."

"Ah, I see; then our pleasant little sail must

come to an abrupt end. Well, all right, I'll strike out for the shore. I'm very glad I had a chance to give you a trip, even though it was so short. I suppose you will be going sightseeing to Washington with your Uncle soon, Willie?"

"To Washington with Uncle Gerald? He didn't say he was going anywhere but to Stedley," said Willie in a puzzled tone.

"Oh, don't say I mentioned it," the man remarked carelessly, "of course, Mr. Thorne wouldn't be apt to tell little boys his secrets. I let it slip in an unguarded moment. He has a wonderful workshop, I hear, down in Stedley."

"I don't know. Has he, Jimmie?" questioned Willie-Frank, but Jimmie seemed tongue-tied or deaf, for he answered never a word and barely thanked the stranger as he sprang out of the boat as it touched the landing.

"Good-by and thank you very, very much," said Willie blithely as he hopped out last of all. "I'll tell my Uncle how nice you were to us. What is your name, please?"

"Oh, pshaw, don't mention it. I like youngsters and enjoy seeing them happy. No, don't tell your Uncle about me. He's a big man. He wouldn't remember me. I'm not an important personage, young Willie. Good-by, we may meet again some time. Until then good luck."

As the children walked slowly over the central bridge through the gardens to Arlington Street, Jimmie said decidedly, "I don't like that man."

"Don't you?" said Willie; "well, isn't it funny,

Jimmie, I didn't like him as well after we got into the boat as I thought I would."

Lizzie, Johnnie and Jessie did not hear these remarks; they were following slowly after Willie and Jimmie and seemed happy over their two unexpected pleasures.

Three o'clock arrived and so did Mr. Stanley. As he steered the automobile up to the Arlington Street gate, a strange sight awaited him. Willie and Jimmie were the "end men" of a fascinating row of happy little faces. In between were Lizzie's joyful countenance, Jessie's dimpled cheeks and Johnnie's freckled nose.

"Ah, some friends you have met, I presume," said Mr. Stanley kindly. "Where do you live, little folks?"

A street in the west end was mentioned by Lizzie. "Good-by," she called sweetly, marshaling her little band of three and waving to Jimmie and Willie as they entered the shining car. Johnnie stood spellbound, eyeing all the splendor of his recent playmates.

Mr. Stanley jumped out, helped Lizzie in before she quite knew what he was about, swung Jessie and Johnnie in after her, slammed the door and started off.

"What are you thinking of, Stan?" growled old Mr. Trent.

"Poor little tads," laughed Mr. Stanley. "Just take a look at their faces."

Jimmie and Willie enjoyed that ride every bit as much as did Lizzie and Johnnie and Jessie.

Up the hill to the State House they rolled and then on to Charlestown and saw the wonder of wonders to them, the famous monument. Next came a ride along a road fresh and bracing with salt breezes, and lo, soon the car rolled along the Revere Beach boulevard, stopped, and Mr. Stanley opened the door of the tonneau and bade the children run down to the sand and the sea.

Between Mr. Stanley's and Mr. Trent's indulgence, a happy party of youngsters rode home to Boston two hours later, armed with bags of popcorn, air balloons of gay colors and many souvenirs of their trip to Revere Beach. They drove to the door of the tenement house where Lizzie and her little brother and sister lived. Mr. Stanley lifted them out, each in turn, raised his cap and said good-by kindly.

"Good-by!" screamed Willie and Jimmie. But already Jessie and Lizzie and Johnnie were surrounded by an admiring throng, clamoring for information regarding their "grand adventure."

"Oh, Uncle Gerald, isn't Mr. Stanley great?" enthused Willie when he went in to kiss his Uncle good-night just before bed-time.

"Fact," said Uncle Gerald in his gay, bantering way, then he added gravely, "I know of no better hero for a lad to copy than our dear old Stan, do you?"

"Yes, I do," piped up Jimmie. "You."

Jolly Uncle Gerald sent a big plump pillow flying straight at Jimmie then. All boys know what a merry, mad romp followed.

At last a big, blustering doctor who was famous for his skill and equally famous for his love of small boys, came in and added to the hilarity. Then he sent the lads off to their own rooms to bed by telling them that jolly Mr. Thorne would never get well unless he "cut out all this fooling."

That frightened Willie and Jimmie so much that they gave their beloved "Uncle Gerald" a warm hug apiece and scampered away with his big booming laugh ringing in their ears.

Jimmie was still struggling with a boot lace when nimble Willie in pajamas knelt down to say his prayers. He had a custom of praying out loud and Jimmie always enjoyed listening, although he said his own in whispers.

"Oh, dear God," Willie said at the end of his devotions that night, "thank You ever so much for all my jolly surprises and for Uncle Gerald and Mr. Stanley and Jimmie and Lizzie and Jessie and Johnnie and Mr. Trent."

"Amen," joined in Jimmie quite unexpectedly. Curly rose from his rug at the foot of Willie's bed and barked sharply. Jimmie's shout had awakened him from his first beauty sleep. Soon all was quiet in the room. Willie and Jimmie and Curly had sailed away on that "mystic sea, where the old shoe rocked the fishermen three, Wynken, Blynken and Nod."

CHAPTER XII

THE BIRD STORE

UNCLE GERALD'S big, jolly doctor lived at the hotel and had a daughter named Janet Fenmore. She and her little cousin, Augusta Pierce, who was visiting her, became fast friends of Willie and Jimmie.

The older girl was a charming comrade to all little children. She was sweet, vivacious and most refined and so strongly did she remind Jimmie of his sister, Ellie, that he in particular loved her devotedly.

Augusta was a gentle little maiden. Willie and Jimmie found her a perfect playmate. She had soft, golden-brown curls and serious hazel eyes. When she smiled, two roguish dimples popped in and out of her cheeks and made her look like some merry, wee fairy ready for a frolic.

Curly was her abject slave from the first moment he saw her. He loved to follow her about and chase her ball. He was so supremely happy after she petted or praised him that he used to roll over on his back and wave all his paws in delight.

One afternoon when Janet was entertaining the children she was obliged to go to take her music lesson, so asked her little friends if they would

like to visit the Public Gardens with her maid, Beatrice, and enjoy themselves once more on the Swan Boats.

"Mr. Thorne has given his permission, boys," she said blithely, "I telephoned to him."

"Oh, goody, goody," was the cry.

"Come back at four o'clock," said Janet cheerily as they started, "and I will serve high-tea in my sitting-room."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Willie.

"Cheers!" shouted Jimmie.

"How lovely!" sang Augusta.

"Yap, yap!" chorused friendly Curly.

Janet's sitting-room was very gay and pretty, and "high-tea" meant ice-cream and fancy cakes.

Upon reaching the Gardens the children ran straight to the pond while Beatrice sat down with her sewing and chatted with a friend.

The boys, remembering their friends of a previous day, told Augusta of Lizzie and Jessie and Johnnie.

"Oh, do you think we will see them to-day?" asked the little girl.

"Let's walk around and look on the benches," suggested Jimmie.

They did this, and although they met many other friendly children, Lizzie, Jessie and Johnnie were nowhere to be found.

"I'm going out and look up the street; perhaps I'll see them on the sidewalk," said Willie.

"Do you see them?" eagerly questioned Augusta, hopping out to Willie's side.

"No. Guess they aren't coming to-day, but I know where they live, so I could find them," boasted Willie.

"You don't remember how to get there," dared Jimmie.

"Just you wait and see," challenged Willie gayly. "Will you follow my lead?"

"Yes, yes," answered both children.

So, holding the end of Curly's leash in his left hand and Augusta's small hand in his right, Willie started off, Jimmie racing after him.

"How do you know this is the right way to go?" demanded Jimmie as they turned up a shabby, hilly street with hot, uneven sidewalks.

"I'm not quite sure it is," confessed Willie. "But I'm pretty sure," he added consolingly.

Augusta climbed on uncomplainingly. She felt warm and tired, but the strange sights and the spirit of adventure encouraged her.

Jimmie stopped short and sat down on the curbstone.

"What's the matter?" asked Willie.

"I think we're lost," remarked Jimmie. "Let's turn back and try to find the Gardens instead of Lizzie's house."

"Why, Jim Cleary," protested Willie, "we must be nearly there now. I don't want to give up the very first thing. I said I would find it and I want to try."

"I don't think we are lost," laughed Augusta cheerily. "When we get very tired we can just go right back the way we came."

"Forward, march!" said Willie firmly.

"Forward, march!" echoed Augusta bravely.

Jimmie, although very uneasy, rose and tramped along beside them.

Curly began to grow weary. They took turns carrying him.

Although they made many turns and traveled up and down many side streets, Lizzie's house seemed as far away as ever. Even Willie became somewhat discouraged. That they might really be lost did not occur to him. He thought Jimmie was fooling when he had mentioned such a thing. They were now descending into a noisy, dirty district. They met numberless children, some of whom they spoke to, and all of whom seemed kindly disposed to the three strangers and their pretty dog. They even followed them at a little distance. So far they had met no one who knew the Grants.

At last in a narrow alley they passed some larger boys who were sitting on the curbing and seemed to be quarreling.

"Hello, there!" one of them called out to our trio. "Where did you come from?"

"The Gardens," answered Jimmie politely enough, but he pulled hard on Augusta's hand and looked at Willie. He did not like the appearance of these lads and wanted to urge his companions to hurry.

"Wait just a second," commanded the tallest, roughest looking youth. "Where did you get that dog? Hey?" He advanced toward the children

frowning and put his hand on Willie's collar by no means gently.

"He's my dog, of course," said Willie in a surprised tone. "Let go," he added, trying to shake himself free.

"Drop that dog. Do you hear?" the strange boy growled.

His companions had gathered around the children, and Jimmie, liking their rough looks less each moment, held Augusta's hand the tighter and urged Willie to "pull away."

The poor lad tried to do so, but in vain. Quickly one surly youth reached out to snatch our beloved Curly. A wild yelp! Curly gave the outstretched hand a sharp nip with his small white teeth, and at that moment Willie exerted all his strength and wrenched himself free.

Seizing Augusta's hand once more, holding fast to Curly and echoing Jimmie's cry, "run," they flew down the alley as fast as they could go.

But their pursuers were older and could cover ground quicker. Capture seemed alarmingly near.

"Turn down this street," panted Willie. "If they catch me, Jim, you dodge and get away with Augusta. We mustn't let them hurt her."

"Not if I can help it," assented Jimmie firmly.

"Oh, don't let them get Curly," exclaimed Augusta. "Run! run! run! I can go much faster, really I can. Hurry!" and this spirited little girl actually dashed forward, thus spurring her friends to make another effort.

In spite of all their bravery and all their swift-

ness, seizure seemed perilously certain. Only one boy was chasing them now; the others did not dare to leave the alley and run the risk of being observed by the police. He was, however, the oldest and most disagreeable youth of the crowd. His arm flew out, his hand was within an inch of Willie's collar, when a small, dark-eyed Jewish child, who was sitting on the low step of a dingy store, sprang to her feet.

"Come in here. Come quick!" she called in a shrill young voice. She threw open the door of the shop and held it while Jimmie, pushing Augusta before him, darted in. Willie nimbly followed, Curly safe in his arms. Then the little girl slammed the door and bolted it.

"He will try no more to catch you," she said gayly. "Mine brother has already frightened him before. See, he runs! Bad, bad boy that he is."

Through the grimy show window where the wares of the little shop were displayed, this new friend watched their late enemy slink back into the alleyway. She whirled around and faced our young friends.

"Thank you ever so much," cried Willie.

"Thank you. Thank you," chorused Augusta and Jimmie.

"This is mine brother's store," confided the little girl. "On the Sabbath it is not for business open all the day, but I come downstairs to feed the pretty polls and little birds and bunnies and I step outside to look up the street. I sit down and after a little while I see you run, the pretty

little girl and the two little boys. I say to myself that I will help you. I did. Do you like mine brother's store, yes?"

For the three eager children, attracted by strange sounds, and growing accustomed to the darkness of the narrow room, were peering curiously about them.

"See the birds," exclaimed Jimmie.

"Oh, so many!" cried Augusta. "Where did they all come from?"

"Ho-ho-ho! Ha-ha-ha! There's a mouse under the counter," shrieked such a strange, harsh voice above their heads, and so unexpectedly that it was no wonder our friends jumped and looked inquiringly at the little dark-eyed girl.

"Be quiet, naughty Polly," she scolded. " 'Tis that parrot on the big perch who was talking. See!" she explained, pointing to a large gray bird, who with ruffled plumage and roguish eye was swinging jauntily from a long, thin, round stick hung horizontally from the ceiling by means of strong twine.

Augusta laughed merrily and Willie and Jimmie joined her.

"This is a lovely shop," praised Willie. There were birds in cages, small animals in crates and ever so many delightful things to see and talk about.

"I like the bunnies best. They are in this window," said the little girl.

"Oh, aren't they sweet?" exclaimed Augusta, bending over the low wooden partition to stroke a

small bunny's soft, silky head and long pink ears.

"Will, keep Curly away, but do come and look at these jolly chaps," enthused Jimmie, almost losing his balance and falling headlong into the sawdust with the attractive rabbits.

"Look out there!" laughed Willie. "It must be lots of fun," he added, addressing the little girl, "to have so many nice pets to play with."

"They are not to play with," answered the child rather sadly. "Mine brother sells them all. Then he buys perhaps more. I love the new ones, too, and then again he sells. I like best to keep the same ones forever," and her loving little arms flew out in the direction of all the tiny creatures in feather or fur. "My name is Ruth," she said, crossing over to Augusta's side. "Please tell me all your names."

"Augusta Pierce, and this is Willie Thorne, and this is Jimmie Cleary," answered Augusta.

"Mine whole name it is Ruth Zabrisky. Do you like that?"

"Yes," replied Augusta politely.

"I like your dress. It is to me so very pretty," went on Ruth, gazing at the soft white frock admiringly. "I like, too, your pretty hat. Do you like mine dress?"

"Yes," answered Augusta again, "and I think your sash is beautiful. I wish I had one. I like red ever so much."

"Mine sash cost much money," smiled Ruth happily. "Mine brother is next week to buy me one red hat. He will sell Jocko and then mine

birthday present he will buy. I will show you Jocko. He is very sad, very cross; he should be very funny. Wait. You will see." Ruth vanished behind a dingy chintz curtain, but quickly returned carrying in her arms a quiet brown object.

"It's a monkey. Jimmie, Willie, come and see! Oh, the cunning, tiny darling monkey!" enthused Augusta.

On the narrow counter Ruth placed her peculiar pet. A long chain was attached to his small leather collar. Augusta tried eagerly to "make friends" with Jocko. Jimmie and Willie came leaping to her side. In spite of all their friendly overtures, in spite of Ruth's gentle scoldings, Jocko refused to be coaxed into happiness. A more solemn, sad-faced little monkey has never been seen, I am sure. He paid no attention whatever to any of the children after he had once rolled his beady black eyes in their direction. He sat now in a mournful heap with his eyes shut.

Curly had meanwhile been having a glorious time. He had explored the shop. He had spoken to several cunning little puppies through the slats of their crate. He had terrified a small blue Persian kitten and he finally had his inquisitive nose nipped by a cross blackbird, who was sulking in an old cage in a dark corner. This last adventure sent him yelping to Willie for consolation.

"Curly, look at the monkey," cried his master gayly. "Do you remember our old Gyp and how you used to scrap with him? This poor little mon-

key is quiet. Our Gyp was a terror," he explained to the rest.

Before he could say any more a queer thing happened. Curly sniffed and barked. The monkey opened his eyes. Curly barked again and, I am sorry to confess it, snapped. Not a cross little snap though. It seemed more like a playful, teasing one.

Out shot one of Jocko's brown hairy arms, and lo! he had boxed Curly's white ears. Then such a laughable warfare began. The monkey was alert and bright-eyed now. Curly was wildly mischievous. It seemed as though the two little animals were both enjoying the fray. They were careful not to hurt each other severely, but they certainly tried to be as tormenting as possible.

Suddenly Willie knelt down on the dusty floor. Jocko had sprung to the ground and was pursuing Curly the full length of his chain. Curly's leash trailed behind him. He was bounding round the monkey yapping teasingly.

"Gyp—Gyp, don't you know me? Gyp, Gyp!" called Willie.

Jocko stopped in his race after the dog and blinked at the boy with his bright black eyes.

Willie slapped his pocket. "Sugar, Gyp! Whom will I give it to, you or Curly?"

The monkey hesitated for a second, then, chattering, scolding, whimpering, the funny brown animal leaped at Willie and tried to put his tiny hand into the boy's pocket.

"Oh, it is Gyp! Curly, you knew him, didn't

you?'' Willie was hugging the monkey, his face aglow with joy. He had discovered a dear old friend! Gyp had at last recognized his former master!

CHAPTER XIII

GYP

A LOUD rapping on the door startled the children.

"Yes, they went in here, I saw them," said a loud, commanding voice. "I thought nothing of it until I got the call from headquarters. I had my eye on the boy who chased them. I wanted to catch him and his crowd to give them a lesson, but the children went in here, I am sure of it."

"Who is it? What do you want?" demanded Ruth through the keyhole, but she kept the key in her hand and did not offer to slip the bolt.

Another voice was heard talking rapidly outside.

"It is mine brother," confided Ruth to the rest. "He will fix them. Do not fear, they will not get you, those bad boys."

Jimmie, listening more intently than the rest, shouted:

"Open the door, do, Ruth! I think Mr. Thorne has come to find us."

"Uncle Gerald? Why, he couldn't walk," cried Willie, still holding Gyp in his arms. "And besides he doesn't know where we are."

"I guess we've been lost all right," said Jim-

mie, "and I'm sure he has come to find us," he added, as a strong hand rattled the knob of the door:

"Ruth, Ruth, are you there?" a man called. "Slip the bolt, child. Let me in." It was a guttural foreign voice, but it sounded kind.

" 'Tis Jacob, mine big brother," cried Ruth joyfully. Slipping the key back into the hole and pulling aside the huge bolt beneath, she threw the door open.

In the street, drawn up close to the curbing, was a taxicab. In the narrow doorway of the shop stood three men, dark-eyed Mr. Zabrisky, who strongly resembled his sister, a burly policeman and a tall brown-faced man leaning on a thick walking-stick.

"Uncle Gerald!" screamed Willie. "How did you find us? Look at Gyp. He's the monkey you sent me once."

"Ah! They were here after all," said Mr. Thorne, nodding gratefully at the officer of the law. Then, "Bill, you have led us a wild chase to-day, my boy, but I am glad it ended successfully." He spoke very quietly, his eyes resting lovingly on the faces of the children. Only the two men knew how deeply moved the strong man was. He had been under a terrible strain, and as he entered the dingy store he stumbled, for his foot was very painful.

"Sit down, sir," Mr. Zabrisky said courteously.

Amid the dim shadows of the bird store Willie

told his story frankly to his Uncle, surrounded on all sides by friendly faces.

"I didn't mean to get lost," he said finally. "I'm sorry, Uncle Gerald."

"I know you are, old chap," Mr. Thorne said kindly, putting his arm around the boy. "You and I must learn together, Bill, not to be so rash and thoughtless. We often make much trouble for others by not looking before we leap. But, there, you have learned a lesson to-day that you will not forget, I am sure. We will not say any more about it. We must take little Miss Augusta home now and apologize for all the worry we have caused her dear ones. I am glad that you and Jimmie tried to take good care of her." He smiled kindly at honest Jimmie, who flushed with pleasure.

"They were very good to me," commended Augusta. "I love them very much, and Ruth, too; she saved us, didn't you, Ruth?"

Uncle Gerald rose in spite of his aching knee and stooped to shake hands with little Ruth. She smiled at him shyly.

Our small travelers were surprised to learn that it was long after five o'clock, that Miss Janet had been so frightened when Beatrice had returned after searching through the Gardens for her charges in vain, that she had gone in great distress to Mr. Thorne. He had urged her to be as calm as possible and leave matters in his hands. Mr. Trent and Mr. Stanley were away. Mr. Thorne was under the doctor's orders not to leave

his room, but like his small nephew he usually obeyed his first impulse. Tossing crutches aside, armed with a cane, he had sent messengers forth in all directions, had notified police headquarters, and in a taxi had started out himself, outwardly calm, inwardly suffering agonies of mind.

That Uncle Gerald generally accomplished whatever he set out to do was soon shown. He had traced the children to the west end by various clews and very fortunately hailed the policeman who had finally guided him to the door of the bird shop. This good officer had recognized the children from the descriptions given him from headquarters as the three whom he had seen the alley-boys chasing. He was on his way to search for them at Mr. Zabrisky's store when Mr. Thorne had spoken to him from the cab window.

I have only space left to say that the policeman made some very true friends that day. Uncle Gerald was able to do much to advance his interests, and although the man had no thought of reward at the time, he soon found that Mr. Thorne was a person of much influence and that he never forgot a kindness.

Mr. Zabrisky and Ruth were very hospitable. They urged Mr. Thorne and the children to remain and share their evening meal. As this was impossible, owing to the sad state of anxiety in which Miss Fenmore was plunged, our friends were obliged to hurry away.

Uncle Gerald, however, thanked the bird store

man very graciously and assured little Ruth that the children would see her again very soon.

But sadness fell on Willie's heart when he learned that he could not take Jocko (properly called Gyp) away with him.

Mr. Zabrisky explained with regret that he had sent for the monkey to New York for a customer; that he already had in his possession a deposit made by the same customer. Could he cancel the agreement he would be glad to for the little boy's sake, but he feared this to be an impossibility, as the man was coming that same night, expecting the monkey to be ready for him.

"See what you can do for us, please," advised Mr. Thorne. "I would like to purchase Jocko if your customer will accept some fitting compensation for his disappointment. Will you take my address, please, and let me know later what you can do?"

Kind farewells were exchanged, Mr. Thorne and the children were proceeding to the taxi, when the monkey's anguish became a torture to Willie's affectionate heart. Poor Gyp, since his separation from his little master, must have suffered many hardships and much loneliness, for he actually moaned and cried pitifully when he saw Willie and Curly about to depart without him.

"Oh, Uncle Gerald," pleaded Augusta, adopting in her grief Willie's name for Mr. Thorne. "Please, please take him with us. Don't leave the poor monkey."

Mr. Thorne pressed her hand gently. "Don't

fret, little one," he said soothingly, limping back to the shop door. A sight met his eyes which affected him keenly. Gyp, straining on his chain, jabbered wildly at Willie.

The boy, who was generally sunny, brave and merry, had put his arms down on the dusty counter and with his head buried in them was sobbing great tearless sobs that wrung the tender heart of little Ruth.

"Oh, Jacob dear, give Jocko to him, please," she begged.

"I cannot," said Mr. Zabrisky, sadly shaking his head, "but I am very, very sorry."

Mr. Thorne drew him aside and talked with him very earnestly, then he said briskly:

"Come, Billy-boy. Brace up! We really must go."

"Yes, sir," our hero answered quietly. He straightened himself with an effort, but not trusting himself to look at either Gyp or Ruth he bolted out of the shop, Curly following. When Mr. Thorne reached the cab, Willie was holding the door open for him. "I'll be all right pretty soon, Uncle Gerald," he said, trying to smile so bravely that Mr. Thorne longed to take him in his arms and comfort him, but knowing that boys must be treated to "sterner stuff" so they may develop strong and manly traits, he merely nodded at the child brightly and said:

"That's right, my boy. I quite understand."

Janet was returning from her long and fruitless search just as the taxi drew up in front of

the hotel. You can imagine her joy and relief of mind.

"It was all my fault," confessed Willie bravely.

"No, it wasn't," announced Augusta. "I wanted to go, you know I did, Willie."

"So did I," agreed Jimmie.

"You dear little tots," exclaimed Janet, struggling between laughter and tears. "It is I who am to blame. You don't know how I have reproached myself," she added, addressing Mr. Thorne, "for undertaking the care and entertainment of the children only to neglect them."

"Nonsense," laughed Mr. Thorne. "I could easily claim that the fault lies at my door, but we would be playing an endless game of 'who's it?' All's well that ends well and we should be very grateful."

"I am, I am," exclaimed Janet joyously.

Mr. Stanley, Mr. Trent and the doctor suddenly appeared.

"Jerry, it was madness for you to have done this," said the latter sternly.

But again Mr. Thorne laughed reproaches to the winds.

"You will see me walking every day hereafter," he replied merrily. "I start for Stedley with Willie and Jimmie on Monday."

"Stedley?" exclaimed Mr. Stanley in surprise.

"Stedley?" echoed the doctor and Mr. Trent.

"Stedley?" cried Janet sadly.

"Oh, Mr. Thorne, are you really coming back

to Stedley with us?" shouted Jimmie, his bright eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Yes, Jim, I hope so," answered Uncle Gerald kindly.

Jimmie was capering around the room in a very lively fashion. He felt so happy that he could not keep his feet still.

"I'm so glad Mr. Thorne is coming with us," he explained tc Willie, "and I'm so glad to be going home, too."

"Don't you like Boston, Jimmie?" asked Willie in a surprised tone.

"Yes, you bet I do," laughed Jimmie, "but I love Stedley."

"I think you, too, will grow fond of Stedley in time, Will," Uncle Gerald assured Willie.

"I guess I will, all right," the boy agreed pleasantly, but strange to say the little lad was very quiet and serious. He did not complain, in fact he made a big effort to be cheerful, but the fate of Gyp hung over him like a cloud. Mr. Thorne loved the child all the more for his stern self-control, but neither of them mentioned Gyp again that night.

Monday morning Mr. Jake, with the brown automobile, reported for duty and drove Mr. Thorne, Miss Fenmore, Augusta, Jimmie and Willie-Frank downtown to one of the big stores, where the children were each to select a gift for Ruth Zabrisky.

Augusta's choice was a beautiful doll. A doll-carriage lined with soft pink, rolling on rubber

tires was Willie's selection. Jimmie decided on a doll's piano, as Dolly Lambert liked hers the best of all her playthings.

"Who is Dolly?" asked Augusta.

"A little girl who goes to my school. She lives in Stedley. I play with her," announced Jimmie all in one breath.

"Her papa is the aviator that we told you about, whose airship fell on the island, and who was hurt by the tree," explained Willie.

By this time they were in the car again and their purchases with them. Mr. Thorne and Jake talked a great deal about the doll carriage taking up so much room, but when they saw the anxiety on Augusta's face they hastened to say that they were only joking.

And now where do you suppose they went? Straight to Ruth's door, where they delivered the gifts themselves to that delighted little maiden. Willie did not want to enter the shop. He handed the doll carriage to Ruth, who ran out to the side of the car, and smiled at her affectionately, but he made no attempt to follow Janet, Augusta and Jimmie when they alighted and went inside.

"Oh, by the way, Will," Mr. Thorne said in an off-hand sort of a way, "run in and see Gyp. Mr. Zabrisky telephoned to me this morning that the monkey is going to have a very nice home and kind owner. He will not be lonesome much longer. I knew you would be pleased to hear such good news."

The man, watching the boy's face, intently saw it brightened noticeably for the first time since Saturday evening. Willie gave a tiny sigh of relief.

"I'm glad the man will be kind to him," he said sincerely, "but I don't want to say good-by to Gyp, Uncle Gerald. I'm afraid I'd cry again, and poor Gyp would cry too."

"Oh, nonsense," laughed Mr. Thorne. "You are rather too brave for that! Run along! Go say a kind word to the monkey."

When Willie entered the bird store Ruth's brother smiled broadly at him. "Here's Jocko, sir," he said, leading our hero to a crate standing ready for shipment. It was large enough to afford the animal plenty of room.

Through the bars of the cage the monkey saw Willie, and recognizing him, gave a shrill cry, thrusting one wiry arm out in welcome.

Willie threw his arms around the crate. "Good-by, Gypie," he said softly, but his tone was pitiful.

"Look at the tag. Read what mine brother wrote upon it," chanted Ruth, dancing up and down.

Mr. Zabrisky pointed to the piece of white cardboard tacked neatly on the top of the crate. Willie read wonderingly:

Master William F. Thorne,
Thorne House,
Stedley, Mass.

Without looking at any one, Willie rose, bounced out the door, into the auto and threw his arms around his Uncle's neck. "Oh, thank you, thank you," he sobbed, and really there were tears in every one's eyes. They all knew then how keen poor Willie's sorrow over the loss of his pet had been, although he had borne it so silently.

Uncle Gerald put his arms tenderly around the child and kissed him, but the next moment called out:

"Well, we must be off."

While the rest of the party exchanged merry farewells with Ruth, Mr. Thorne handed Mr. Zabrisky a check. He also thanked him for his kindness and urged him to get Gyp safely started for Thorne House at once.

Mr. Zabrisky had really gone to a great deal of trouble to induce the man for whom he had bought Gyp, to relinquish his claim and wait a few days until the bird store man could order another pet for him.

"I have already 'phoned home to Jean and asked him to undertake the care of Gyp for you until we arrive this evening, Will," Mr. Thorne explained to his nephew. "Mr. Zabrisky has a friend going through Stedley on the ten o'clock train. He will leave Gyp with old Matthew, the station agent. We could not comfortably carry him along in the machine, as Mr. Trent will be with us, and Curly is too much for us as it is."

"Rosalie will take care of him, too," laughed Willie. He was his own merry self again.

Well, after that they went spinning out to see Franklin Park and the Zoo proved delightful to the children.

At noontime, Augusta bade the boys good-by. She was going home to Beverly. "You are coming to visit me in August," she announced joyously. "My Daddy told me so. He went to college with your Uncle Gerald. They are great friends. You will be at my house for my birthday party, August 27th. We can play on the beach and swim and have lovely times. Good-by."

"Good-by," called out both boys, waving their caps wildly as her train puffed out of the North Station.

Miss Janet and Augusta shook their hands to them from the window of the car. Then Mr. Thorne, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Trent and the boys returned to the hotel, took lunch, after which they started forth for Stedley. Every one they had met there bade them a very affectionate good-by. No one could help liking Mr. Thorne. The two little boys had also made many friends, and Curly was as great a pet there as he proved to be everywhere he went.

Mr. Stanley and Mr. Trent left our party at a small town before they reached Stedley to visit, for a few days, some old friends.

Oh, such a happy entrance as the brown automobile made into Stedley the second time it ar-

rived there! It stopped first in front of Dr. Cleary's house. When Mrs. Cleary appeared in the doorway, what a shout Jimmie gave! He didn't wait for the tonneau door to open, but leaped over it and straight into her loving arms.

Mr. Thorne and Willie visited with the Cleary family for a few joyful moments. Uncle Gerald was greatly beloved by these dear friends, and it was years since they had seen him. Then Jimmie excused himself and hurried down the street to be in attendance at Father Owen's instruction class.

Just at sunset Jake steered the automobile up the broad driveway of Thorne House, and Willie-Frank, cuddling up close to his Uncle, said softly:

"I'm ever so happy! Last time I came I was all alone and I was afraid you'd be cross like the giants in fairy-tale books. You're not one bit. My, but I love you, Uncle Gerald!"

"Same to you, Will," laughed the big man. "Welcome home to Thorne House."

They had arrived in front of the stone lions.

CHAPTER XIV

WELCOME HOME

SUCH a joyful welcome as Mr. Thorne received!

Baxter came running to help him out of the machine before Jake had a chance to do so, a smiling, bowing, talkative Baxter, quite unlike the grave butler of Willie's first evening at Thorne House! He beamed at Willie also.

"Baxter, did Gyp get here?" asked the boy. "My monkey, I mean?"

"Yes, sir. Jean has him safe and sound for you."

Mrs. Pepper, in rustling black silk, was at the door, her face radiant with happiness.

"Good evening, Baxter. You look quite natural. Glad to see you," Uncle Gerald said genially, giving the man's hand a warm grip. He valued highly these fine old servants who had remained so true to his family and their interests for so many years. "Well, Mrs. Pepper, here we are!" he called out cheerfully, mounting the steps slowly and smiling meanwhile at the housekeeper.

His cane was in his right hand but his left arm was around Willie's shoulders. He wanted the little lad to enter the doors of Thorne House at

his side and to enter also amid such cordial greetings that he might indeed feel that this was home, a place full to overflowing with love and happiness.

"Ah, Master Gerald, your poor foot is no better," wailed Mrs. Pepper, suddenly growing mournful as she watched his halting steps.

"Never mind my poor foot; a few days' rest in my old den and I'll surprise you by striding around this place finding fault, scolding and raising ructions generally," he laughed teasingly.

Mrs. Pepper threw up her hands. "Hear him!" she ejaculated in remonstrance. "He that never was known to say a cross word in his life! Indeed, it's more likely, Master Jerry, dear, that you'll go about laughing and praising and spoiling the help. Good evening, Master William. I'm glad to see you home again."

"Good evening," answered Willie, pleasantly.

"Some boy, isn't he, Mrs. Pep?" Uncle Gerald said, rumpling his nephew's bright hair and then dropping his hand to the lad's shoulder again. To Willie's surprise the housekeeper praised him in the most glowing terms.

"It's exactly like Master Don he seems," she enthused, adding:

"Come in, come in, sir, you must be tired standing here so long."

But to Willie's amazement his big Uncle suddenly dropped his cane with a bang, gave a boyish shout and hopped with something of Willie's own agility into the dim shadows of Thorne

House hall. He was shaking hands tenderly with a very old colored woman. He was laughing down at her affectionately.

"Mammy Dorcas, you dear old soul! It was uncommonly good of you to come out here to greet me," he was saying eagerly. Then he turned back to our hero. "Come, Will, and meet Mammy Dorcas. One of the best friends your Daddy and myself ever had."

"Massa Jerry, honey, don't you go for to talk so foolish. 'Tain't no friend I am, only a po' ole darkey what lubs the very ground you walks on." And the loyal old creature gazed up at the tall man with a world of true love in her dim eyes.

Willie ran forward crying excitedly:

"Oh, are you Mammy Dorcas? My, but I'm glad to see you. Thank you for those gingerbread boys. They were great. Johnnie said they were the goodest cakes he ever tasted. We ate them at the Swan Boat's Landing in Boston."

Nothing could have pleased the devoted heart of Mammy Dorcas more than this friendly gratitude on the part of "little master." He was told to come to the kitchen "any time ob day" he wished and that he could have all the cakes he wanted. She even promised to let him make some gingerbread men of his own.

"And molasses candy, too?" questioned Willie eagerly.

"Now, now, this is too much," laughed Uncle Gerald. "Mammy Dorcas, you must not spoil

that child, remember,'' and he shook his finger at her roguishly.

''Spoil him, Massa Jerry, when there ain't no spoilin' to any ob the Thornes. They's gen'lemen through and through; they was and always will be. Big hearts, libely dispo'shuns and gentle manners. I knows 'em all. I'se libed with the Thornes since I was just about so high as you is, little Massa Willie. I played many a time when I was a pickaninny with yore Grandpa, the ole Massa. My fambly came up North wif yore fo'ks years and years ago.''

Willie could have listened to this quaint old woman's conversation for hours, but Mammy Dorcas suddenly remembered that Mr. Thorne was not quite so rugged as usual and that he had traveled a great distance. She went toddling off to see that the ''po' white trash out in the kitchen is serbing you uns fit stuff to eat,'' she explained hastily.

Soon Uncle Gerald and Willie were seated in the big dining-room. The last red glow of sunset was reflected in the long old-fashioned mirror over the fireplace. The room looked very homelike and cheery.

. . . . . .

All the next day Willie was busy renewing his happy friendship with kind Jean and Rosalie, playing with Gyp and petting Twinkle, who had missed his young master and Curly exceedingly. Just before tea time Jimmie ran over to ask

him to come down town and watch Ted Bemis drill some of the other boys as soldiers.

When the two chums, with Twinkle and Curly at their heels, went running across Stedley Common, Willie cried out excitedly:

"Hi, Ted!"

Ted whirled around and seeing the small boy skipping across the green sward with his two pets in attendance, looked puzzled first, but at last smiled broadly:

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "It's Curly, but he's had his hair cut."

"It's Willie-Frank," shouted Bob Evans, dropping his broom-stick and forsaking his place in the foremost line to dash towards Willie, his freckled face aglow with friendship.

"I'm back," proclaimed Willie mirthfully.

"I see you are," said Ted. "Did you have a good time?"

"Splendid," declared Willie fervently.

"Thanks for that post-card you sent me," said Bob Evans.

"Did you like it?" asked Willie joyfully.

"Yes. Guess I did! Jack said it was clever to send me the picture of the Aquarium after our fun that day fishing."

"I liked the Stadium. That was the one you sent me. I want to play football when I get heavy enough," spoke up Ted.

"He sent me an Indian's picture. It was great," chimed in Ray Lester.

"Hi!" exclaimed Willie, recognizing him and shaking hands.

All the lads came surging around him and his two dogs. Curly and Twinkle were very friendly and even consented to do a few of their tricks.

"Aren't you going to drill any more?" Willie asked at last in a disappointed tone.

"Yes—get into line. You, too, Jimmie! You must have guns before our next drill, though."

"I have an air rifle. Will that do?" questioned Jimmie anxiously.

"Sure," consented Ted.

"I have one too," exclaimed Willie, and as Ted gave the first word of stern command they slipped into their places.

They marched—they turned—they ran. They presented arms—they gave salute—they charged—all at the direction of Captain Ted.

As the boy finally ordered them to disperse cheers filled the air.

"That was almost perfect to-night," said a little girl running forward. She had long black curls and a laughing gypsy face.

"Oh, Ted, why can't I be in it too? I know I could march better than Bobbie Evans."

"No, Dolly, course girls can't be in the drill. Quit teasing," protested Ted grimly.

"But women are fighting with the soldiers over in Europe," clamored Dolly. "Papa told me about them yesterday."

"Let Dolly drill if she wants to, will you, Ted?"

pleaded Jimmie, who always proved a loyal champion.

"Dolly's much smarter than you are, Ted Bemis, and she can run faster than any of those boys in your company and she walks straighter, so there," cried one of the other girls who had watched the drill at Dolly's side.

"We don't want girls in our company," grumbled Dick Smith. "Girls aren't brave anyhow."

"Yes, they are, too. Augusta is very, very brave. Isn't she, Jim?" unexpectedly spoke up a new friend.

Dolly turned her bright eyes full upon the animated face of Willie Thorne.

"Who is Augusta?" she asked sweetly. She was sometimes called a tomboy, but she was never rough or boisterous. She was what older girls would term athletic. She could excel any boy of her own age in the village in most outdoor sports, but she was nevertheless a girlish little girl with a gentle voice and pretty manners.

"Who is Augusta?" she repeated greatly interested.

"She is the little girl who got lost when we did," explained Willie; "she never cried a speck but ran hard to save Curly."

"I like her," declared impetuous Dolly.

"She was all right," Bob Evans asserted.

"Ruth was brave, too," said Jimmie.

Of course a general cry went up demanding the story of Ruth, which Jimmie told with glowing cheeks and lively gestures. Willie listened as at-

tentively as any of the rest. He sat on the grass with his arms around Curly and Twinkle. The terrier gave tiny whimpers of joy every few moments, striving to lick his master's face and hands. Willie's occasional whisper of "Dear old Twink" seemed to give the dog great pleasure.

"Cheers for Ruth," yelled Ted, when Jimmie reached the dramatic portion of his narrative which described the little Jewish girl in the act of banging the door of the shop in the face of the alley boy.

"She certainly was great," cried Ray Lester. "What happened next, Jim?"

Much excitement prevailed during the remainder of the story, but when Gyp was mentioned, there was a great war-whoop.

"A monkey?" screamed Ted.

"Yes. He's Will's. He's up at Thorne House now," answered Jimmie.

"Honest Injun?" queried Bob Evans.

"May we see him?" begged Dolly eagerly.

"Oh—I'd be afraid," giggled another little girl.

"How silly!" laughed Dolly. "Afraid of a dear little monkey."

"Will you bring him down here some day for us to see?" asked Ted, throwing himself down at Willie's side and tweaking Curly's ear playfully. Curly seemed to like Ted, so he merely rolled over and good-naturedly yapped once or twice.

"Come up now and I'll show him to you," invited Willie, jumping to his feet. He was racing

away expecting them to follow him when Dick Smith hailed him:

"Do you mean for us to go up to Thorne House?"

"Yes," smiled Willie in his friendly way.

"Nothing doing," announced Ted decidedly. "Why, they'd turn us out so quickly if we went up there that we wouldn't know what happened to us."

"Come with me and try," said Willie cheerily. "You don't know Uncle Gerald or you wouldn't be afraid. Come, Dolly." He seized her hand and thus led the long line of children that soon swarmed up to the side veranda of Thorne House.

"What is the matter, Baxter?" asked Mr. Thorne pleasantly from behind his paper. He lay full length on the deep couch in his smoking-room.

"It's a mob of village children, sir, all armed with sticks and stones. Mercy, sir! They are chasing the little master and little Miss Dolly."

"Nonsense, Baxter, don't get excited," remonstrated Uncle Gerald, reaching for his cane and swinging himself as rapidly as possible to the French window facing the oval around which the boys and girls were surging at Willie's bidding.

"Why, Baxter, those sticks are supposed to be guns, man! I fancy Willie has led the crowd back with him to get a glimpse of Gyp. You will find out for me if we have fruit or cake enough in our larder for the youngsters?"

"Uncle Gerald," called out Willie in his ani-

mated way, perceiving his best friend standing at the window. "Please may I show Gyp to my friends?"

"Come, Gyp, you rogue, out with you," commanded Mr. Thorne, who was experiencing much amusement from this new adventure. He pushed the screen aside and out leaped the monkey.

How the children laughed and clapped and cheered as the frolicsome brown midget climbed nimbly up the rose trellis and sat amid the early blossoms, scolding at the crowd mischievously. Seeing Willie, however, Gyp came leaping down again. With a sly pinch for Curly and a saucy cuff for Twinkle as he passed them by, he bounded up to his beloved master's shoulder, and proceeded to show his affection by all sorts of comical caresses.

When Mr. Thorne could make himself heard amid the uproar which resulted from Gyp's funny antics, he stepped out to the edge of the porch and addressed the little folks gayly. He had a kind word for every child, and knowing many of their relatives, sent friendly messages to a father, mother or brother, as the case might be. He smiled with special indulgence upon merry Dolly Lambert. Taking her small hand in his large brown one he said gently:

"So this is Tom Lambert's little daughter! I am pleased to meet you, my dear. To-morrow I hope to ride over to the hospital to visit your Papa. I am sure Mrs. MacDonald will get you ready to accompany me." Dolly lived with kind

Mrs. MacDonald, the wife of the gardener of Thorne House.

Dolly's dark eyes were raised to his face gratefully. "Oh, Papa will be so glad and I'd love to go. Thank you very much for letting Mr. Jake drive us over every day since Papa was hurt."

"Tut-tut," laughed Mr. Thorne. "Thank Will for that, the brown automobile is his. He is the guilty party."

"He's joking, Dolly," exclaimed Willie. "Of course, he was the one who told Mr. Jake to call for you and take you to Kanton, but he doesn't want to be thanked."

"Papa said you were the best man in the world. Mrs. MacDonald thinks so too. I know you are," declared Dolly fervently.

"So do I," screamed Willie, hugging his Uncle's knee, not the sore one fortunately.

"So do I," shouted Jimmie, prancing after Willie to seize Mr. Thorne's arm.

Baxter and Eugene appeared at this moment laden with goodies. A horrified Mrs. Pepper followed them, hoping to remonstrate with "Master Gerald," but in vain.

The big brown-faced man who had made many scientific discoveries, and who had written several valuable books concerning the minerals hidden away by old Mother Earth in the pockets of her mountains, was sitting now on the top step of the veranda, distributing refreshments to the happy, eager children who pressed around him rapturously.

"Is this Ted Bemis?" he asked quietly, stooping over to lay his hand on a boy's rough head—a boy who in shabby, ill-fitting clothes sat alone on a corner of the broad stoop, looking shy and uncomfortable.

"Yes," Ted replied gruffly.

"Ah, have a cake, Ted, do!" Mr. Thorne urged in his most winning tones.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER OWEN'S INSTRUCTION CLASS

"YOU live with Farmer Frost, I believe?"

"Not going to after this week," mumbled Ted, accepting a frosted cookie with an embarrassed smile.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Thorne.

"Lawyer Bartlett and old man Frost have fixed up some silly papers that hand me over to some other guy," confessed Ted, with a tiny choke in his rough young voice. He had been knocked about so much in his short life that he felt very sad and lonely.

"Frost was cranky enough, goodness knows," he confided to this new friend, led on to do so by something very tender and sympathetic in Uncle Gerald's bright eyes; "but I was just getting used to him and he did let me go to school sort of regular. I don't know who the new chap is that I'm going to live with now. Lawyer Bartlett asked me bushels of questions about my Pa and Ma. I don't remember Pa, but I told him my Ma was the best ever. She was," he finished up fiercely with a look at Mr. Thorne that seemed to say that Ted would deal harshly with any one who disputed that statement.

"I knew your father well, Ted," Willie's Uncle said kindly. Mr. Thorne and the boy were alone on the steps now. The children were busy watching Gyp's funny attempts at stealing Curly's cake and the small dog's methods of fooling the naughty monkey.

"You did, sir?" asked Ted eagerly, bounding to his feet.

"Yes, my boy. You were a baby when I met Mr. Bemis and your brave mother out in a small Western town. Your father was a very quiet, literary man, Ted, who because of ill-health could not do all he wished for his dear wife and beloved little son. We met accidentally and became fast friends. I asked him to come to Stedley and he did. He edited the town newspaper here for two years and then died. Unfortunately, I did not hear of his death. I thought he was getting along here nicely. Since my return, I learned to my deep regret that after his death your mother moved to Boston and was reduced to poverty. After her death you were taken by several different families, and finally claimed by Farmer Frost of this town, who was eager to adopt a bright, strong boy."

"Yes," assented Ted. "My, but I'm glad you told me all that about Pa and Ma, sir."

"Do you like to go to school, Ted?"

"School? You bet!" laughed Ted ruefully. "I want to learn a lot of stuff so I can be a doctor some day like Jim's father. I like Doc Cleary, he's the best man in this town. Wish I knew who

had adopted me though," he added with a little sigh and a droop of his shoulders.

"Ted!" Mr. Thorne reached forward and laid his hand on the boy's head very gently. "Ted, would you like to live here with Will and myself at Thorne House?"

"Here?" Ted leaped to his feet and gazed around wildly. "Why—why—I couldn't."

"Why not?" smiled Uncle Gerald.

"Because—it's—so—so fine and—grand and—all, sir," poor Ted gasped out jerkily.

"Would you like to, is the question I asked, Ted?"

"Like to! Say, Mr. Thorne, please don't jolly me to-night. I'm sort of sore and shaky over this Lawyer Bartlett stuff."

"I am not fooling, Ted. I am the man for whom Lawyer Bartlett secured those papers. You are my boy now and I hope forever. You are to come home to Thorne House some time to-morrow."

Ted dropped down on the gravel walk with a thud and stared at the big man in dumb bewilderment. Then he sprang to his feet, waved his arms and shouted:

"Honest? Honest and true?"

"Certainly," laughed Mr. Thorne. "Perhaps you forget about plunging into Stedley Lake one night not long ago, thinking Willie could not swim. Well, I heard of it, Master Ted, and I am not likely to forget a deed as brave as that, young man. We want to show you at Thorne House

that we value the stuff that heroes are made of, even though the hero is only ten years old. Good-night, Teddie, pleasant dreams. Remember you are to move all your possessions into Thorne House to-morrow," and laughing merrily, Uncle Gerald nodded at the stupefied boy and hobbled away.

Five minutes later, a very sober Ted advanced to watch Gyp and Curly. Something wet trickled down the boy's cheek; he dashed it away with his hand. "It is time to say good-night, oh all you little folks," called gentle Rosalie from the doorway. Laughing merrily, the children trooped off after fondling Gyp, Curly and Twinkle.

The next day saw Ted installed as a permanent member of Thorne House.

Saturday afternoon, Ted and Willie-Frank, each with hair smoothly brushed and faces shining, tore at a reckless pace down the driveway of Thorne House.

Near the entrance gate stood a pretty stucco cottage with a red tiled roof, and under the morning-glory vines on the porch sat a dear old-fashioned grandmothery sort of a person. Good Mrs. MacDonald, the gardener's wife, was beloved by all children for miles around, and Willie's heart warmed to her instantly. She threw down the sweater which she was industriously knitting and drew the little boy to her knee. She pushed back his hair from his forehead gently and looked at him long and closely and then how fondly she embraced him.

" 'Tis like both my boys ye are," she announced proudly. "Ye have Don's face and hair and eyes, but ye have Gerald's smile. God bless ye. 'Tis of a fine family ye come, my little laddie."

A flutter of wings and a jubilant cry from Dolly's lips caused Mrs. MacDonald and the boys to turn their heads in her direction. On the small grass plot to the right of the Lodge stood dainty Dolly, fresh and sweet in a simple white dress and white shade hat. Both her hands were extended as she gave her happy cry of welcome.

Swift and true in its flight sped a carrier-pigeon, and gracefully flew down from mid-air to nestle on Dolly's shoulder. It was a pretty, pretty sight. Ted and Willie approached their little comrade softly across the velvety grass, but Dolly raised one pink finger warningly, and caressing the bird's smooth plumage with her other hand, ran lightly but swiftly to old Mrs. MacDonald's side.

"It's a message from father," explained Dolly. "Some one takes my pigeon to him nearly every day. Eben Hollister took it up to Kanton early this morning. Then Papa writes me a message, the nurse opens his window at the hospital and he sets Fleet Wing off on his journey back to me.

"Oh, see what's written," she continued, holding forth the thin small piece of paper which Mrs. MacDonald had taken carefully from the quill-like

sheath in which it had come, attached by a silken thread beneath Fleet Wing's wing.

"Dear little Brighteyes: I am growing stronger with lightning speed now. My love to you, dear, and God bless you—Papa."

Well, Willie-Frank was so happy over this adventure, and so in love with Fleet Wing, that steady Ted had to remind Willie and Dolly that they must hurry if they expected to be at the church in time to greet Father Owen. Then both children tore themselves away from Dolly's pretty pigeon, which after its flight from Kanton was well content to fly into the neat dovecote which old Giles had erected for her pet at the rear of the house. It was Giles who had trained the pigeon and presented him to Dolly on her last birthday. Willie could talk of nothing but Fleet Wing all the way down the street.

On the steps of the old frame building they found other eager members of the First Communion Class, and Willie was introduced by Dolly very gracefully.

"Father Owen invited him to come to instruction with us," said Dolly sweetly. "He will be in next year's class. He has come to live at Thorne House, forever. Haven't you, Willie? And oh, I am so glad," she hurried on to say in her bright, friendly way without stopping for Willie to answer. However, he smiled at all his new friends cheerfully and nodded his bright head.

"Here he is! Here he is!" the youthful voices

chorused soon in glad delight. Up the street came the young boyish figure of the priest. Eager little feet bore the children swiftly to his side. Circling around him they greeted him joyfully. Each one had something to tell this dearest and best of friends. Some little happiness or disappointment or even of some little act of self-denial practised in honor of the Great Day so soon to enfold them in its all blessed joy.

One moment Ted had alone with the priest as he stood holding the door open for Father Owen as he marshaled his little force in order to their places within this poor but holy spot.

"Father," the lad said eagerly, "our Lord has been ever so good to me. I don't feel worthy somehow to have Him come to me in Holy Communion. I'm not fit and He's done so much for me already." Then stumblingly and swallowing an occasional lump in his throat Ted told of the home and happiness which had come to him so unexpectedly.

"Ted, my boy, do you remember how discouraged you used to get and how hard it was for you to persevere, at first? And do you remember that you did persevere, and that you came to every instruction, no matter what obstacle was put in your way, no matter what work was piling up for you to do afterwards? You were generous, Ted, to God, generous in trying to be good and brave and true under very hard circumstances, and remember, my dear boy, that God is never outdone in generosity. He has given you a home and dear

friends, but He is about to give you more than that—far, far more, as you realize. Accept His divine and royal gift, Ted, but accept it with the purest, noblest heart that you can prepare for the coming of such a King."

"I will, Father. Oh, indeed, I'll try to," promised Ted with such determination expressed in his honest eyes that it made his boyish face beautiful.

To-day, Father Owen did not tell the children, as he had during other instructions, of the little saints of God who in ages of persecution had glorified their King by deeds of Christian bravery and innocent loyalty. No, to-day he dwelt very simply and very sweetly upon the attributes of that Great Guest who was soon to knock for admittance at the door of each child's heart.

He told them again the ever beautiful old story of a little Child born amid poverty and cold one winter night in a lonely cave in Bethlehem. Of a Boy who walked amid the byways of Nazareth in the simple tunic of the poor, His father's carpenter box upon His shoulder or His Mother's pitcher in His hand to fill at the village fountain. A Boy gentle and compassionate to young and old. Of a Young Man in all the regal glory of His manhood, not seeking high places among the princes of the world, not seeking fame, or fortune or pleasure, but renouncing all that human hearts hold dear, to go forth on His divine mission of preaching to the poor, the sinner and the suffering.

He reminded them that even amid the stress of that public life of Christ, tired and weary as He was, one evening after traveling and teaching all day long, the little children of Galilee had run to Him, reaching out their arms for His caress.

"Ran to Him, my little boys and girls," said Father Owen, "even as you are soon to run, begging for His blessing and His caress. Did He refuse the children of Judea? Ah, no. Hear those gentle loving words of His, which have echoed down through hundreds of years to fall anew on your ears to-day:

" 'Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

"A great and holy Pope, whose death so saddened the Christian world a few years ago, is called the Pope of the children, because his great heart conceived the beautiful idea of allowing the children to receive our dear Lord in Holy Communion at a very early age. He, too, like his Divine Master, said, 'Forbid them not,' and therefore, my little flock, you must pray most fervently for Pius X on the day of your Great Happiness and beg his intercession with the Good God that you may live ever so pure and holy as to be among those who sing the praises of the Lamb of God, forever, before the Great White Throne above. And pray for those near and dear to you, your kind fathers who toil so hard all day that your life path may be made easy for little feet.

"Pray for your sisters and brothers, friends

and playmates. Bring them all in fancy to our Lord's wounded feet when He sits enthroned within your spotless heart, and ask Him to bless each one of them lavishly.

"And for your mothers! Ah, my little ones, pray the sweetest prayers that heart can frame and lips can whisper for your mothers. Dear, loving, patient mothers who have loved you so unselfishly from the moment of your birth. And pray to Christ's dear Mother on that golden day and sing to Her, our best of mothers, a hymn of grateful praise, because it was she who gave us all Her dearly beloved Son to suffer and die to redeem us.

"Remember that Her own tender heart was cruelly torn with grief to see Him, shamed and bruised and wounded and dead! Comfort Her with your love and promise Her that you will always hold Her dear Son dearer than any one else on earth, until you meet Them both in Heaven."

But there, I could never tell you exactly what Father Owen said. His was a beautiful soul, filled with thoughts so sweet and sublime, that they fell from his lips like music of golden bells from Paradise.

He finally urged the children to prepare their hearts each day like beautiful little garden plots, wherein to set up a golden throne of love for their King. "Fill your garden beds, during these days of preparation, with the roses of love of God and love for one another. Do loving deeds, be generous, for God loves generous hearts. Cultivate

the spotless lilies of purity that they may strew the pathway upon which He enters your soul. They will remind Him of His Mother, lily-fair and spotless white. And there must be pansies. These will be thoughts of Him often during each day, little ejaculations bidding Him welcome, urging Him to come and dwell forever in your heart's garden spot. And the violets of humility, as you whisper, over and over, 'O Lord, I am not worthy.'

"Think of Him constantly now, and be obedient, gentle, loving as He was to Mary and Joseph in the little house at Nazareth!"

At bed-time, Mr. Thorne limped slowly into Willie's room, a pretty room where morning-glories clustered and cherub faces smiled.

"Not in bed, Will? Why I thought you must have drifted off into Blanket Bay long before this," laughed Uncle Gerald.

Willie was standing on a chair before the picture of Christ blessing little children, examining it very attentively. He turned as his Uncle Gerald spoke from the threshold.

"Oh, Uncle Gerald, do you know Father Owen? He talked to us to-day at the church and I cried, Uncle Gerald, not baby-crying, you know, but because what he said made me feel so happy in here," and Willie pressed both hands to his breast.

"You were so happy that you cried, eh!" teased Uncle Gerald, then very gently, "Yes, I know Jack Owen well. He was one of the little chaps

when I was quite a good sized lad—a fine little fellow. He had a nice way of talking, even then, but mischievous; he was brimming over with mischief I mean. Tell me what he said to-day, my boy, that you liked so much that it made you cry."

"He told us about what this picture means," explained Willie-Frank, "and he taught us a poem, it was beautiful, one part was like this:

"'But Thou art my Shepherd,
I Thy little lamb;
Take myself, dear Jesus,
All I have and am.'

"I wish I could receive my First Holy Communion with Dolly and Ted and Jimmie, but if I'm very, very good, I may next year, Father Owen said."

Uncle Gerald sat and listened after Willie was in bed to the repetition of Father Owen's words in Willie's own vocabulary, and when he kissed his small nephew good-night he said seriously:

"Grow up true to what Father Owen tells you, Willie, and I'll feel that your dear Daddy's wish for you will be realized. Dying, he said to me, 'I want my little boy to be a good man, Jerry; nothing else matters, old boy.' Father Owen can inspire the principles that make the best sort of men, I think. Good-night, Will, and pleasant dreams."

"Uncle Jerry," murmured Willie sleepily, "when I'm a man and have lots of money I want

to build a nice church in Stedley. I don't like that old wooden house we use for our church now. I'd like a nice one made of stone and with a splendid gold cross on top of it."

Before Willie quite finished his wish his voice trailed off into a drowsy whisper, but the happy smile of anticipation remained on his lips.

Then Uncle Gerald went in to say good-night to his older boy—Ted.

CHAPTER XVI

LOST!—THE HEIR OF THORNE HOUSE

PERPLEXITY and sadness reigned in Stedley three days later. The news spread like wildfire from house to house that Willie Thorne was lost. No trace of the boy had been found since early morning. Dolly Lambert and he had started out together to look for Fleet Wing, the pigeon, which had failed to return from Kanton on Monday with its message from Mr. Lambert.

Dolly was heart-broken and Willie-Frank had offered to go with her and search along the road, in case Fleet Wing had been hurt and was not able to fly. At noontime Dolly returned alone. She and Willie had walked as far as Hollister's farm, but found no trace of the lost pigeon.

While Dolly was talking to Hetty in the big sunny kitchen, Willie had gone out. When Dolly went to call him in time to start back home, he did not answer her summons. Though they looked for him about the farm and along the lake shore, the search was unsuccessful.

"Probably cut across lots home and forgot ye, Dolly," comforted Eben. "Boys are mostly thoughtless young critters, you know."

"I don't think Willie would run away like that," said Dolly, shaking her curly head. "Perhaps he went on down the road looking under the bushes for Fleet Wing."

Good-natured Hetty ordered Cy to harness Sue, her own old white horse, to the runabout, and she drove Dolly down the road for more than a mile. No sight of Willie-Frank gladdened their eyes. Then back to Thorne House they rode, firmly believing that they would find him there, with some good excuse for his desertion of Dolly and the quest of Fleet Wing.

But he was not there, and as hour after hour passed the household and all of Stedley, even people who had never met the little boy, were filled with anxiety and sorrow over his disappearance.

Mr. Thorne was away. Mr. Stanley had arrived the day before at Thorne House and early on the day of Willie's disappearance he and Mr. Thorne departed in the automobile which he had driven when he came down to Stedley to take Willie and Jimmie to Boston. Although he still suffered greatly from his injured foot, Mr. Thorne had felt that he must take a certain long journey on very important business at once. This was all that he had told Willie-Frank when he bade Ted and himself good-by, but he urged them to be happy and obey Mr. Stanley, who would come back to take care of them after taking him to the station in Boston.

Upon his return that evening Mr. Stanley showed no outward signs of alarm when he heard

the news. "Don't worry," he said quietly. "We will find Master William, I'm sure."

"This letter came for Mr. Thorne an hour ago, sir," said Baxter brokenly but dutifully, handing a soiled yellow envelope to Mr. Stanley. "A ragged sort of an urchin delivered it, sir. He nearly pulled the knocker from the door, sir, and when I reprimanded him he made a face at me and said something about his worrying, a queer slang remark, sir, it was, adding that he had earned a cart-wheel for delivering that note and that he guessed he'd go and spend it now. He said the man who sent it told him not to deliver it until six o'clock, sir."

"Very well, Baxter, thank you," said Mr. Stanley, and he was about to lay the envelope down when something about it seemed to attract his attention and he tore it open hurriedly. He read its contents swiftly, then reread the lines again more slowly. When he looked up there was a fine white line about his mouth, a flash of just anger in his eyes. He stepped to the telephone and messages began to fly east, west, north and south. Detectives, Secret Service men, and influential friends of Mr. Thorne were notified of an act of treachery which aroused them all, stranger and friend alike. And a message went by night letter to Washington to greet Mr. Thorne's arrival there that was destined to fill that gentleman's heart with keenest anguish.

The note which Mr. Stanley had read, boldly but firmly stated that Willie Thorne's safety de-

pended solely upon his uncle's decision. Would he for a large compensation sell an invention, upon which he was known to be busy, to an alien power, or would he destroy his work entirely and desist from all further inventions until after the Great War. On his acceptance or refusal of these propositions rested the fate of his young nephew.

Oh, the sadness and anxiety of the day that followed! The kidnapers had covered their tracks cleverly. Willie-Frank could not be found, but with unswerving patriotism an invention that meant much to Uncle Sam, an invention that was destined to combat greatly the menace of U-boat warfare, was submitted absolutely and unreservedly to the United States Government by Mr. Thorne.

His first message in answer to Mr. Stanley's telegram read:

"Will be home to-morrow. Spare no expense. I will find him. They dare not harm him. G. Thorne."

On Sunday morning at nine o'clock Mass the ardent young disciples of Father Owen received the great Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The little girls, in soft, white dresses and snowy veils, went two by two with downcast eyes and upraised hands to the altar railing. Into innocent hearts, aflame with childish love and reverence, they received the Bread of Life for the first time. Then the boys, in neat black suits with white ribbon bands on their arms, went slowly up the altar steps in their turn. Ted Bemis lingered longer

than his companions at the railing, as though he had lost all memory of time or place.

Afterwards he told Father Owen in his halting, boyish way that "I'm sure Willie is safe and will be found soon, Father. I felt it somehow when I tried to say a welcome to Our Lord and when I promised Him I'd try to be a good boy always, and grow up to be a good man."

"Did you ask our Lord to keep Willie safe in His care and restore him to us all?" asked Father Owen gently.

"Yes, Father, I did," answered Ted, flushing rosily. "You said our Lord wanted us to ask Him for something we needed very much, and that He would surely hear us on our First Communion Day in a most special manner."

"So I did, Ted," answered Father Owen, "and I am sure your fervent prayer will soon be answered, my boy."

"See what Mr. Thorne sent me from New York. He's there now tracing one clew the detectives gave him, but he didn't forget my Great Day, Father." Ted held on high a silver rosary which caught the glint of sunbeams and flashed back a silvery glow.

One by one, the children came after their thanksgiving to whisper in Father Owen's ear what their first petition to the King of kings had been. In every case it was the same, and Father Owen's eyes grew misty as he listened.

"I meant to ask our Lord to make my Papa well very quickly," confided Dolly Lambert, "but Papa

said no, to ask for Willie's safety, and oh, I did, Father, oh I begged for it so hard."

"Father, after I thanked God for coming, like you told us to, I told Him please would He find Willie-Frank soon," Jimmie Cleary stammered bashfully.

Breakfast was served to all the First Communicants by old Mrs. Owen, Father Owen's mother, and his good aunt, Miss Polly, in the pretty little yard of their neat cottage. They had begged so eagerly to have this pleasure that the parents of the children had joyfully and gratefully accepted the kind invitation for their little ones. What was the children's delight to find that Father Owen himself was to sit at the head of the long table and eat breakfast with them. The spiritual joy of the golden day had been perfect for each child, and they now felt that all material joy would be perfect, too, if only Willie-Frank, their dear young comrade, was safe and laughing merrily with them once more.

Early Tuesday morning Ellie Cleary, Dolly, Jimmie and Ted were walking briskly along the woodland road which lies between Kanton and Stedley. They were talking earnestly and did not realize the swift approach of an automobile until a sharp "honk, honk" made them step nimbly up the banking at the side of the narrow thoroughfare.

"Stop, Jake," called a familiar voice, "these are young friends of mine, I'm sure. Why, Ellie and all you little folks, what in the world brings

you so far in the woods this early in the day?" It was Uncle Gerald who leaned out to speak to the children—a tired, worn, harassed-looking Uncle Gerald, but as thoughtful and considerate as always.

"Jump in; there's room and to spare for all of us," he continued. "Here, let me help you," and out he stepped, slowly however, because of his foot which was still lame. "And now tell me how you are and where you have been at such an early hour."

"To Mass and to Communion in Kanton, Mr. Thorne," announced Dolly joyfully. "We are making a novena to the dear Sacred Heart of Jesus that you may find Willie soon."

"Ah," said Mr. Thorne, quietly, "but why do you have to go so far as to Kanton to assist at Mass?"

" 'Cause we haven't any church, you know. Not a real one with a pastor all our own," explained Jimmie. "We can only have Mass once a week in Stedley. To go every day we have to walk to Kanton."

"Walk to Kanton! You don't mean that you walked to Kanton and back this morning?"

"Oh, we're not walking now, we're riding," Ellie reminded him blithely.

A queer look crept over Uncle Gerald's fine face, his strong lips quivered a little, he tugged at his motoring cap and looked ahead through a long vista of pine trees arching over a pine strewn road, but he saw it all through a mist of tears.

So they cared enough to make such a sacrifice, the brave little mites! They had walked to Kanton to pray in a special and particular way for his little boy, the uncertainty of whose fate was branding itself in agony into his heart more terribly than red-hot irons could have seared his flesh.

"Mr. Thorne," said Ted, speaking for the first time, "I'm sorry, but Twinkle, the fox terrier, is lost. We can't find him anywhere, and Curly is so heartbroken pining over Willie that old Giles is afraid he will die. He hasn't tasted food lately at all. He only laps a little milk."

"Poor, faithful little fellow," exclaimed Uncle Gerald, "perhaps I can coax him to eat. As for Twinkle, I hope we can find him. Will would be desolate indeed to find both pets missing upon his return."

Mr. Thorne spoke quite naturally, but his voice trembled ever so slightly over the mention of Willie's name.

"Oh, look, look, there's Twinkle now!" eagerly called out Dolly Lambert.

Every one stared and Jake stopped the car. Tearing through the bushes at the side of the road came Twinkle. He barked as though he recognized Mr. Thorne and the rest, and then tore back through the brambles again.

"He has found a clew," cried Uncle Gerald, as he swung himself out and after the small dog as fast as his lameness would permit.

The boys and Ellie and Dolly followed eagerly.

Mr. Jake was obliged to remain at the wheel, but he looked as eager and excited as the others.

Poor Twinkle was a sorry looking dog. He looked hungry and sad and neglected, but he wagged his stubby tail and ran straight back to a small soft object over which he was keeping guard.

"Willie's cap!" shouted Ted.

Mr. Thorne raised the tiny brown cap and held it tenderly in a hand that trembled a little. "Twinkle followed the scent thus far," he explained quietly. "Good dog, good Twinkle, where did they take him after that, Twink?" But the dog only whined pitifully and crouched at Mr. Thorne's feet as if ashamed to acknowledge that his keen powers had failed him so early in the search.

"Ah, he was probably carried from here by some one else," commented Mr. Thorne, "and that is why Twinkle is unable to help us."

"Cheer up, Twinkle, this is a clew, anyway; but for you we might not have found even this."

"Here is another clew," said Ellie softly, and raised a pigeon's quill in her hand from which trailed a silken thread.

"Oh, it's the quill in which Papa sent messages to me by Fleet Wing," exclaimed Dolly. "I know it is."

Sure enough, inside the quill, safe and clear, was the last note that Mr. Lambert had sent, and which Fleet Wing had never delivered.

"Willie must have roamed as far as this in search of the bird," said Uncle Gerald, piecing

the different bits of information together like a picture puzzle. "Under this tree he found Fleet Wing hurt, perhaps, and unable to fly. He untied the message from its wing and was probably busy helping the bird when the kidnapers overtook him and carried him away."

"But where is Fleet Wing, I wonder," said Dolly.

"Probably flew away a short distance, if able, in fright," explained Uncle Gerald, "and I fear may be around here suffering even now."

But no trace of the bird could be found. The boys promised Dolly to return and look for her pet later, but now Mr. Thorne was eager to reach Thorne House and give news of the clew which Twinkle had found to the Secret Service men and detectives. Of course, Twinkle went back with them in the machine to Stedley.

Dolly sat down to breakfast half an hour later and was eagerly telling Mrs. MacDonald of their morning adventure in the woods when, with a whirr of wings and soft, sweet "coo-coo" straight in through the open kitchen window flew Fleet Wing and nestled against Dolly's cheek and perched upon her shoulder.

"Oh, see! see! see! It's Fleet Wing, dear Fleet Wing. Where did he come from—and, oh, maybe Willie-Frank will come soon, too. Fleet Wing, where is Willie-Frank?"

"Coo-coo-coo," was the plaintive answer.

"Oh, poor Fleet Wing, your little leg is hurt and some one has bandaged it, poor, poor Fleet

Wing," murmured Dolly, holding her pet carefully and examining the slender leg ruefully. Old Mrs. MacDonald put on her spectacles and came over to Dolly's side to look at the injured bird.

"Why, dearie, I think it's a message he's brought ye. It was tied around his leg by some one who did not know how to tie it under his wing."

Sure enough, securely fastened by a strong, slender strand of meadow grass to Fleet Wing's tiny leg was a strip of thin, dirty brown paper, and on it was printed a strange message. Willie-Frank tripped up in spelling occasionally.

"Dear Dolly—I have eskaped. Pleese tell Uncle Gerald come to meet me if he can on the road from Boston. I'm tired to death.—Willie Thorne."

"Run, Dolly, run as fast as yere wee feet can carry ye to Thorne House," commanded the old lady, "and give this note to Mr. Thorne. 'Tis saying the Joyful Mysteries of my rosary I'll be in thanksgiving while ye're gone."

And Dolly needed no urging. With fleetness almost equal to her trusty little pigeon's, she sped up the driveway to the side entrance and burst into Uncle Gerald's den, breathless and eager-eyed.

"A letter from Willie. Fleet Wing brought it," she gasped, as she held aloft the tiny scrap of paper.

For the first time during these terrible days of sorrow and suspense Mr. Thorne's external calm-

ness gave way. At the sight of that dear, printed, boyish note he sobbed, a man's great, hoarse, dry sob of overcharged feelings. Then before Dolly or any one else knew how it happened, he had her in his arms, rushed out with her, and tucked her into the automobile, which was still standing where Jake had left it in front of the stone lions, in readiness for Mr. Thorne's next trip. He also picked up Curly, limp, sorrowing Curly, and tossed him in beside Dolly. He whistled for Twinkle, he called for Ted, and when boy and dog appeared, he shouted joyously. "In with you, Ted. Move quickly! In, Twinkle! We are off to meet my boy. He's safe and trying to find his way home alone, the plucky little chap!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Ted, jumping into the front seat.

"Bow-wow," echoed Twinkle, as though he understood.

"Hurrah, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Thorne as he slid into Mr. Jake's place at the wheel and sent the car spinning down the driveway and out between the huge iron entrance gates. Then, at something far beyond the speed limit, the shining brown machine shot over the road Bostonward.

"Thank God!" Ted heard Mr. Thorne murmur once, and he said it as though his gratitude arose from the very depths of his heart. Other than that fervent prayer, however, Uncle Gerald was a silent host that day to the two children with whom he was racing away from Stedley. On and on, faster and faster, they flew. The dust rose in

clouds behind them. Dogs barked, and from the machine Twinkle answered them joyfully. Children tried to chase after them and shouted loudly, only to fall back laughing and breathless. Ted's hat blew off, but Uncle Gerald never heeded the shout the boy gave.

But after awhile Mr. Thorne was obliged to proceed more slowly. The hot noon-day sun was burning down upon the highway by this time, and as he rounded one abrupt curve in the road he saw a fruit and vegetable wagon slowly advancing. Its driver, a pleasant-faced Greek merchant, was waving his arms at our travelers as though to attract their attention.

"Here's a good chance for you and Dolly to have a lunch, Ted," exclaimed Mr. Thorne, speaking for the first time in hours. "Take this bill and buy some fruit for yourselves. That man must be anxious to sell his wares, poor fellow, when he tries to hold us up in this fashion."

CHAPTER XVII

WILLIE-FRANK AND FLEET WING

WITH a snort of protest, followed by a little purring sound of acquiescence, the beautiful, big, brown car stopped. But before Ted could bound out to do Mr. Thorne's bidding, the vegetable man's young assistant climbed down from his seat hastily. He had a box of luscious cherries in his hand as he ran eagerly toward the automobile, calling out something in a hoarse little voice. He was a ragged specimen of childhood, but picturesque, nevertheless. His small but sturdy legs were bare, dirty and scratched by brambles. His only visible garment was a man's soiled blue jumper. It enveloped the boy in clumsy folds and looked like a scarecrow's raiment, but his hair was a crop of jet black curls. His skin was so dark that he reminded one of a young gypsy, and jauntily over his left ear bobbed a vivid wild red rose.

Dolly seemed delighted with the appearance of this queer, foreign-looking little creature. She smiled at him, but the child had eyes only for Mr. Thorne. He stretched out his ragged little arms to him and tried to call out again, but his voice was only a whisper.

Mr. Thorne slipped his hand into his pocket once

more. The lad was about Willie's age and size and build. "Poor little fellow," Uncle Gerald thought, "for Willie's sake I must give him something. I can't bear to see any child neglected when I remember how I suffered these days thinking of neglect and cruelty enfolding Will," and he shuddered as the memory of some of his past fears returned to him.

But Twinkle, usually so sweet-tempered, apparently took offense at the small fruit-seller's appearance, for with a sharp bark and a low warning growl, he leaped from the car and straight at the child.

"Don't be afraid. He won't hurt you," cried out Mr. Thorne, reassuringly, for the ragged little boy had dropped his box of cherries, and the bright fruit rolled out, making sparkling little dots of bright color in the thick yellow dust of the road.

"Down, Twinkle. Do you hear me, sir? Don't you dare to touch him." Crisp and stern was the command. Uncle Gerald was out of the car before Ted could say "Jack Robinson" (if bewildered Ted had by any chance wanted to say such a thing), and strode over to seize Twinkle by the collar.

"Why, Twinkle's not biting him, Mr. Thorne, he's kissing him," exclaimed Dolly excitedly, and as Mr. Thorne stooped over the boy, what was his surprise to see blue eyes that were strangely familiar. The child threw his arms around Mr. Thorne's neck.

"Don't you know me, Uncle Gerald? Why, I'm Willie-Frank," croaked a very hoarse, croupy voice, but not so hoarse that the love in it could be mistaken.

"Yees, sir," explained the Greek fruit dealer advancing, smiling and bowing. "The leetle boy, he ride with me and help me yesterday. He sleep with me on my blanket all night. We buy more fruit and vegetables to-day, and again he help me and he say to watch for every big automobile, and wave to every big man with gray hair I see. Pore leetle boy, he has had a hard time. I lend him my coat."

"Yes, Constantine has been ever so good to me, Uncle Gerald. He gave me these cherries and I was cold, 'cause I have only pajamas on under this coat of his. He let me take this to cover 'em up, and he put his horse's blanket over me last night."

True enough, a thin suit of pajamas were Willie's only garments under the dirty blue jumper. But the plucky little fellow could say no more, for strong arms had caught him up in a bear-like embrace, strong lips that quivered at the pitiable sight of him covered his tear-stained little face with kisses, and a big tear dropped down on to the old blue jumper.

"My good man," said Mr. Thorne some moments later to the Greek, "how much is that load of vegetables worth? I'll buy them at twice their value and you can give them away to any poor people that you know along your route. Tell me

at what address I can write to or see you. I want to talk with you on business which will be to your advantage.''

As the automobile sped back towards Stedley, its juvenile occupants stood up and waved their hands to the smiling Greek, who, after putting the roll of bills in his pocket, proceeded to put Mr. Thorne's card in his hat for safe keeping. He sang all the rest of that day as he jogged along his route, obeying Mr. Thorne's instructions and giving of his fresh, fine wares to those who would have been too poor to buy them from him at the usual price.

And Willie-Frank? Well, Mr. Thorne wrapped him up in one of the rich robes stored away in the automobile and forbade him to speak a word until he had been rested and nourished, poor child. ''Just sit there and smile at us, Bill. We will do all the talking, dear, until you are quite yourself again,'' and saying this Uncle Gerald looked at Willie with such love and longing in his glance that it really seemed as though he could never see enough of that bright boyish face. A frown of grave displeasure and a set, stern line about his mouth both deepened, however, when he realized that Willie's fair hair had been dyed jet black and that his skin had been stained to a dark, foreign-looking tint.

How Dolly and Ted chattered and laughed and clapped their hands! How Twinkle did bark and yelp and jump up again and again to kiss his dear little master's face! He couldn't help growling

though occasionally at the queer, unfamiliar appearance of his beloved Willie-Frank, but then wasn't he a smart enough little dog to know his master under any disguise?

But what about Curly, you are all asking in most disappointed tones, I know you are. A weak, sober, tottering Curly had risen on uncertain woolly legs when the commotion in the road below had occurred, and had blinked his eyes in a dazed sort of way and had given a feeble "yap, yap!" but when Willie, black-haired and brown-faced though he was, bent over him and croaked out, "Curly, old boy, don't you know me?" his love, too, penetrated that hideous disguise, and his pink tongue eagerly tried to wash that horrid stain off his dear master's face as he joyfully gave a feeble but decided "Yap, Yap, Yap!"

For a couple of days our hero was a very feverish, croupy little person.

The story which he told Mr. Thorne when he was able, I will tell as briefly as I can.

When Willie left Dolly in Hetty's sunny kitchen on the morning of his disappearance from Stedley, he had been unable to find Eben, and so had strolled along the road to see if he could find any trace of Fleet Wing. He found the bird under the tree where Twinkle afterwards found his cap, and the boy had been guided to the spot by Fleet Wing's plaintive "coo-coo." The pigeon was hurt, and Willie sat down to try and ease its sufferings. Suddenly a twig snapped behind him and he looked up to see the man in the checkered

suit who had given himself, Jimmie, and the Grants a sail on the pond in Boston, looking down at him.

"Hello!" Willie had said pleasantly. "Do you live up here, too?"

Without replying, the man seized him, and holding him firmly, pressed a handkerchief over his nose and mouth. Willie had rebelled against both the seizure and the sickly, horrid odor of the handkerchief.

"Don't be afraid," the man said softly, "I don't intend to hurt you."

"I'm not afraid," Willie had sputtered. "Let me down." With his sturdy little heels he had emphasized this demand, but he couldn't remember any more after that for quite a while. In a hazy sort of way he recalled waking up and finding himself in the arms of some one who must have been in the act of springing from the steps of a moving train, for Willie remembered the iron hand rail and that his head had struck violently against it.

"After that it was a long time before I woke up at all," he explained, "and when I did I was in a big bed in a great big room, and a fat lady with a blue dress was giving me a drink.

" 'Don't say a word, duckie, about who you are or where you came from,' she urged, 'and you can soon go back to your people, but if you scream and carry on you may never see your folks again, but anyhow we don't intend to hurt you.' "

Something soft and alive moved under his hand.

He looked down, and there on the bed beside him rested Fleet Wing, watching him with bright bead-like eyes. The fat lady smiled when Willie exclaimed joyfully:

"Oh, Fleet Wing, I'm so glad to see you." She then told him that the man in the checkered suit, her husband, had not wanted to hurt him because he "liked him for a plucky little lad," as she expressed it, and he felt so sorry for what he had to do that he brought "your bird along to keep you company."

Little by little, Willie grew stronger, and one afternoon awoke to find the air very hot, and the fat lady sound asleep in her chair near the bed. It looked so nice outside the window that Willie longed to look out. He got up and crossed the room. The lady still slept. Suddenly a sound which he dearly loved fell upon his ear, the scream of a fast flying locomotive. He pressed his face against the screen and, sure enough, a big engine and its train of fascinating cars flew by—but, oh, what excitement for Willie. Why, there right below his window, across the street, stretched the tracks. It was a railroad crossing, and he recognized it as the one at which Mr. Stanley and Jimmie and himself had waited on their trip to Boston. He remembered it specially because coming back from Boston with Uncle Gerald they had crossed it, too, and Willie remembered distinctly the little red country store with the big tree in front on the other side. He had bought peanuts and candy there.

Just then Fleet Wing flew over to the window ledge beside him and cooed.

"You want to go, too, don't you, Fleet Wing?" the little boy said. "Well, we will. I know the way, I bet I do, and if we can get out I'll run so fast they'll never catch us." He acted on the impulse swiftly. He didn't stop to look for clothes, but, just as he was, with Fleet Wing under his arm, he crept out into the hall. The screen-door was hooked on the inside. Standing on tiptoe the child unfastened it, and while his guardian still slept, stepped out onto the sunlit porch and bounded down the path on to the dusty country road and freedom!

He ran as fast as his bare feet could carry him, but he was still a bit shaky, and his head ached, so that he finally climbed over a stone wall and hid behind it with Fleet Wing beside him until he felt rested. It was here that he noticed that Fleet Wing was quite well again and eager to fly. The bird would fly off a distance and then return to Willie and flutter in the grass at his feet. Then the idea popped into Willie's head to send a message by the pigeon. Of course, Fleet Wing was too smart to fly away without a letter to carry, Willie decided, and caressed the pretty bird. A little boy clad only in pajamas is not apt to have pencil and paper about him, and it wasn't until late that afternoon when he met Constantine, the good-natured vegetable man, that Willie could write his note and tie it to Fleet Wing's short, slender leg.

After Fleet Wing soared aloft, Constantine and Willie rode along, happy in each other's company. The kind Greek had put his own blue jumper over the child's thin night suit. He was much interested in Willie's story, and thought him a most wonderful child to have gone through such an adventure.

"You are a very smart leetle boy," he said in soft broken English.

"It wasn't smart to run away," explained Willie frankly. "The fat lady was asleep. If she had been awake I'd be there yet."

Willie never was able to tell any one when or how his hair had been dyed or his skin stained. It was probably done while he was unconscious the very first night.

When officers of the law, following Mr. Thorne's instructions, went to a certain house situated near a railroad crossing some few miles from Boston the next day, they of course found the house deserted. The owner, a nervous, fretty old lady, when interviewed, entertained the officers with what they termed "a sob story" of the man and woman who had rented it furnished a month ago but who had vacated it suddenly and without notice and had not paid her one red penny of the rent.

In New York some months later a man answering to the description of Willie's captor was arrested as a suspicious character, and later was proven to be an employee of a hostile government.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAREWELL PARTY IN HERMIT'S CAVE

THE island looked very festive. A flag waved over the cave. On the sand in front of it was spread a snowy cloth. Good things of all kinds were temptingly arranged. A boat was moored in a temporary harbor a few yards up the shore. A canoe was hauled up high and dry not far from the banquet table.

It was Ellie's birthday present from her family, and this was Ellie's birthday party on the island.

Ellie wore a white middy blouse and linen skirt. Her fair skin had become tanned from much outdoor life, her eyes were deep blue and her hair fell over her shoulders in two long golden plaits. No wonder the children all loved her. She had a merry but gentle countenance.

"Sit down, ladies and gentlemen," she invited gayly, and her young friends hurried to obey her.

They saw before them sandwiches and radishes, chicken salad, hard boiled eggs, chocolate frosted ginger-bread, candy and cream puffs, and last and best of all Ellie's birthday cake. It had been made by her mother and it had been borne across the lake by Ted, who had flatly refused to take any

one aboard until this frosted delicacy had been safely landed.

"Oh, the candles will not stay lighted," moaned Nettie King, a fretty little girl, as the mischievous breeze blew out one of the fifteen pink candles.

"I'll blow them out right away then," responded Ellie brightly. "I must if I want to get my wish. One, two, three, ready—Puff-puff-puff," and each shining torch spluttered and flickered and died away in a tiny curl of smoke.

"May I go over to Ted's boat for a minute, Ellie?" asked Dolly, looking very important.

All the boys and girls began to smile and some laughed as though they knew a merry secret. Ted shook his head and scowled at those who attempted to whisper.

"You'd spoil anything," he said in a low warning voice to Ray Lester, who was making very peculiar gestures with the deaf and dumb alphabet for Ellie's benefit.

But Ellie was quite unconscious of all this hushed excitement. She looked at Dolly with some surprise but assented politely to the little girl's request. Ellie had begun to cut the famous cake and to distribute its rich slices when a queer, squeaky voice at her elbow made her jump.

All the children began to laugh heartily.

"If you please, I'll have some of that cake," said the voice.

Ellie turned. There stood a tiny stooped creature. Over her shoulders hung a long blue cloak, on her head was a high steepled hat; she tottered

a tiny bit as she bent over her cane on which she leaned heavily.

Ellie, overcoming her first surprise, laughed gleefully and entered into the game with delight.

"Certainly you may have some of my cake, dear madam," she answered sweetly, "but will you tell me your name and from whence you come?"

"I am your fairy godmother," the droll voice continued. "I rode on my white swan from fairy-land to-day to give you three wishes."

"Oh, thank you kindly, ma'am," replied Ellie pleasantly, delighting her audience by dropping the fairy godmother a nice curtsey.

"May I have anything I ask for, dear god-mother?"

"Yes," responded the fairy, almost forgetting to disguise her voice.

"Mind that you wish for the same three things you did the last time we played," warned Jimmie in an eager whisper.

"Keep still, Jim, or you'll give the joke away," commanded Ted.

"Be sure and ask for a gold ring, Ellie," advised Willie-Frank, so excited that he was hopping up and down quite wildly.

"Hush!" warned Ted, suddenly clapping his hand over Willie's tell-tale mouth and muffling the youngster.

Ellie shut her eyes and extended her hands:

"I wish for a garden full of roses," she chanted, according to the rules of the game.

"Behold!" said the godmother gravely.

Still with eyelids shut tightly Ellie pronounced her second request:

"I wish for a pony to ride upon."

"Behold!" repeated the fairy more solemnly than before.

"And last of all," declared Ellie, "I crave a ring of gold and set with precious stones, your royal highness."

"Your three wishes are granted. Behold!" The fairy fairly screamed, but the squeak in the voice vanished, it was Dolly Lambert's sweet treble that made the final announcement, and it was Dolly Lambert who stood before Ellie when she opened her eyes—a rosy, roguish, blissful Dolly beneath the high steepled hat made of brown paper and under the folds of Ellie's own blue military cape.

"You darling," exclaimed Ellie, hugging her. "You acted your part to perfection, Dolly. At our next candy show we can have real theatricals. You are splendid."

"Oh, look! look!" shouted the other children, crowding around her.

"You did not even peep at your fairy gifts!" protested Willie.

"I will peep now," said Ellie gleefully. Of course she did not expect real gifts. This fairy game was always a favorite pastime at these island parties, and it was a rule in Stedley that at birthday celebrations the guests bring no gifts.

Their presence was all that the host or hostess desired.

Imagine then Ellie's astonishment when she saw heaped on the tablecloth at her place dewy clusters of fragrant roses cut from the Thorne House rose gardens. These represented her first wish. In front of her plate stood a candy horse with cherry-colored ribbon for a harness. How Ellie laughed at that! This was wish number two. The great surprise, however, was the small white box that lay near the candy horse.

"Open it, open it," clamored all her little friends.

Perplexed, Ellie obeyed. She gave one look at the contents and gazed around with shining eyes. Then she dropped down on the sand and began to cry.

"Oh, Ellie, don't you like it?"

"What's the matter, El?" the discouraged youngsters asked with keen disappointment.

"Like it? Why, you darlings, I love it, but—but I'm so happy I don't know what to say," exclaimed Ellie, raising a face on which tears and smiles struggled for supremacy.

"Mrs. MacDonald said you were grown up now, Ellie," confessed Dolly, half sadly. "She told us she didn't think you'd play with us much more or ever have another birthday party for us after this. She said big girls ask older folks to their parties and not children, so we wanted to give you a present to remember us by and to tell you forever and forever that we love you."

"You bet," chimed in the boys.

Ellie slipped the dainty ring set with a row of tiny turquoise on her finger and tried to hug all the children at once.

"I'm not grown up. I'll always play with you, and we will have our parties as long as I live," she declared with vehemence. "Oh, I'm so happy. I don't know how to tell you about it," she sang joyously. "It was too much, though," she added regretfully, realizing that the pretty trinket had cost each child many precious pennies.

"Mr. Thorne chose it for us," confided Dolly. "We told him you liked that blue stone."

"It is beautiful, beautiful," praised Ellie.

"Oh, look!" shouted Dick Smith.

Chug—chug—chug, over the shining water came Mr. Thorne's motor boat, but a girl was at the helm and a smaller girl waved to the group on the island.

"Cheers! Cheers!" screamed Willie, dancing a regular horn-pipe. "It's Miss Janet."

"It's Augusta," added Jimmie.

"May we come to your party?" called Janet's silvery voice.

"We have ice cream in a freezer," chirped Augusta gayly. "It's chocolate."

Down to the edge of the shore rushed the members of Ellie's party.

Janet and her dear little cousin were gladly welcomed.

"Mamma and Daddy are over there, too. We

came all the way from Beverly by auto," explained Augusta to Willie.

"We wanted to see for ourselves that our dear little Willie-Frank was really and truly found," said Miss Janet blithely, putting her hands on Willie's shoulders and regarding him fondly.

"Hip, hip, hurrah! I'm glad you did," yelled the boy jubilantly.

"Why, you look just the same as ever," confided Augusta to him after surveying him with much surprise for a few moments. "I thought your hair was black now, and that your face was, too."

"His face is," chaffed Ted roguishly, and everybody laughed, for digging for treasures is hot and dirty work, and our hero had not succeeded in removing all evidences of what had been his toil before sitting down to the banquet.

"Ha, ha!" gurgled Jimmie Cleary. "Augusta thought you'd look like a darkey now, Will."

"Yes," nodded Augusta, her eyes beginning to twinkle.

"His hair is much darker than it was," said Miss Janet ruefully.

"Oh, but Rosalie hopes to get it back to its own color after awhile," chimed in Ellie eagerly. "She washes it with a solution which she knows is good nearly every day, and it has helped wonderfully. See how white his skin is," she added, patting Willie's cheek. "The horrid brown stain that the people who stole him used on it came off quite nicely."

"I liked him to have black hair," said Dolly Lambert regretfully. "He looked like a twin to me then, because his hair curls like mine does."

"Yes, Dolly, but my curls are short," protested Willie, eager to remind every one that the days of long girlish curls were over for him forever. "I don't like curls for boys," he added. "I put soap on mine to keep 'em down."

"Oh, I just love curls," cried out Augusta vehemently, looking at Dolly admiringly.

In that fashion Augusta and Dolly became acquainted. They seemed to delight in each other at first sight. To the tune of merry laughter and chattering tongues, the ice cream disappeared. Curly and Twinkle enjoyed their share very much. Curly remembered Augusta instantly and, as at their first meeting, he lay near her while she was seated, and followed her devotedly when she walked or ran about.

While all hands were busy clearing away the remains of the feast and replacing the baskets, Miss Janet went over to the motor boat, stooped and came back with a large square pink box in her hands.

"Another present for you, dear," she said to Ellie; "we brought it to Willie-Frank, but I know he would want you to have it since it is your birthday, and Augusta and I have no other gift to offer."

"Fine, fine," exclaimed Willie, clapping his hands in high glee. "Open it, Ellie, open it; it looks pretty."

"But it is really yours, dear," protested Ellie. "I couldn't take your present, Willie."

"Yes, you must, you must, I want you to," the boy urged. "Oh, see, Ellie, there's a letter on top. It has your name on it."

"Yes," continued Miss Janet, smiling, "that is a note to you from Mr. Thorne, Ellie. He said to deliver it to you when the feast was over."

The contents of the lovely pink box proved to be bonbons and chocolates, each in a "pretty white frilly cap," as Dolly Lambert said enthusiastically.

Seated in a circle enjoying these new dainties, the happy young people watched Ellie as with eager fingers she opened the big white envelope which contained Mr. Thorne's message. On a gayly colored card which represented a hunting scene with ladies and gentlemen in bright red coats, galloping on horseback after a pack of hounds, was written in his clear, dashing hand:

"Come, let us all a-hunting go,
Be swift, for the prize eludes the slow!
Search till you find an old spruce tree,
There, my second note will be."

Can you guess what happened as Ellie read the lines aloud? Well, with joyful shouts and merry peals of laughter, every one scrambled to their feet and rushed off to find that old spruce tree.

"It's a hunting game!" "Oh, isn't this fun?" "Mr. Thorne always thinks of jolly things," were the happy comments to be heard right and left.

Little Augusta was fortunate enough to find the particular tree first, and so she read the second note which had been cleverly fastened to its trunk.

"A treasure—a treasure—to have and to hold,
More precious than jewels or silver or gold,
Is hidden away in the hermit's old cave.
So hurry to find it. Be patient and brave."

"There is a treasure, hurrah, hurrah!" shouted Bob Evans exultantly. "I always said I'd find it and I will."

"You'll divide up with me, won't you, Bob? I'm your chum, you know," reminded Ray Lester, hurrying after Bob so fast that he tripped over a rock and skinned his knee. Even that didn't delay him, however; he just clapped his hand over the injured member and hobbled along as fast as he could, towards the spot whither every one was flying—Hermit's Cave.

They searched, and they searched, and they searched.

"See what Curly has brought me in his mouth," laughed Willie-Frank. "Poor Curly, he's trying to help find the treasure, too. Ha, ha! Why, Curly, old chap, that's only a rag."

But Curly shook what Willie called a rag and gave it a little toss into the air. A rustling sound attracted Miss Janet's attention.

"It's not a rag, you silly little boy," she said, giving Willie a playful pat on the head. "It's an oilskin bag, and there is something inside it. Curly has found the treasure and is giving it to you."

It was a tense moment. Willie's eager fingers were pulling at the string of the bag when he looked up suddenly and smiled at Ellie, and manfully marched over to her:

"Here, Ellie, you open it. It's your birthday. I'd rather you would." He teased her so hard to do so that Ellie consented at last.

Out of the bag her fingers drew a letter. It ran:

"Dear Young Folks of Stedley:

"The land on Lake Street, which borders Thorne House gardens and rises to a slight elevation overlooking Stedley Lake, has been deeded to the Catholics of Stedley, and a sum of money has been placed on interest at Beacon Bank in Kanton for the erection of a Catholic church in Stedley. This is but a small expression of my gratitude to God for the safety of Willie-Frank, and a slight testimonial of esteem to Miss Ellie Cleary, Miss Dolly Lambert, Master Ted Bemis and Master Jimmie Cleary for the long pilgrimage they made daily to Kanton to offer up a novena for my little nephew's safety.

"I knew of no better day to make known these facts than this anniversary which Miss Ellie Cleary is so generously celebrating with her little friends.

"May God bless you all, my dear children, and may you live long to enjoy the blessings of your Church. Affectionately yours,

"Gerald Thorne."

And that is how Stedley came to have its lovely church of stone with the golden cross of Willie's desire shining over it.

But, there, I am running ahead of my story, so let us return now to the island and there bid our young friends a fond farewell. If you have learned to love them, perhaps we will follow their other adventures later.

Let us imagine we are pushing off from Stedley Island and sailing away.

"Bow-wow-wow, bow-wow-wow!" That must be Twinkle running along the shore. He wants to speed the parting guests.

"Yap-yap-yap!" Pretty Curly refuses to be forgotten.

Let us call back to the cunning pet:

"Good-by, Curly!"

Can you see him in fancy roll over on the sand in delight and wave his tiny paws? See the two dainty little girls waving their hands to us as they stand side by side beneath the rocky ledge of Hermit's Cave. They are sweet Augusta and merry Dolly.

No doubt Willie-Frank calls after us, tossing his cap in the air:

"Good-by! Good-by! Good-by, till we meet again."

THE END

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